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MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1962 Vol. 10, No. 4

A SHORT SUSPENSE NOVEL

THE DEATH GIMMICK

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

To a man who was nine-tenths a scoundrel and one-tenth a roving opportunist . . . the West Indian "paradise" seemed to have everything.

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The Amazing Saga of a

He was tough and unprincipled and knew exactly what he wanted And what he wanted he took— until Destiny called his hand.

Most Unscrupulous Scoundrel

The Death Gimmick

A NOVELET OF KNAVERY AND VIOLENCE IN THE WEST INDIES

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

I MET THE GIRL at three in the afternoon and asked the question at nine. That put me on the conservative side by West Indian standards.

But she shook her head. She had hair with a blackness like six inches of soot. Indian. She had blue eyes and a narrow nose. French. And the movement of her head rippled down through a light-brown loose-jointed body poorly concealed under a loose gray dress. African. Three women in one.

I shrugged and took another jolt of rum smuggled down from Martinique—dark stuff that went down like satin and had a backlash like a stingray's tail. By this time I was feeling only the satin—but I was still sober enough not to coax her. Start coaxing a woman and you lose the initiative, then your troubles begin.

In this case it worked—to the extent that she offered an excuse. "Your bed have no room for me."

The answer was far out, but I laid it to the language barrier. She spoke the local Creole patois and her English came out with a wild swinging inflection that made each statement sound like a question.

I left her standing behind the bar and climbed the wooden stairs of the hotel. I didn't think of her answer again until I lit the kerosene lamp and glanced around my room.

You couldn't miss the damn bed. It was a gigantic four-poster that dominated my tiny room like a dead hippopotamus lying on its back with all four legs sticking

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straight up in the air. There was enough room for her and four more like her.

I noticed something odd about the bed. All four posts sagged toward the center, as though pulled inward by the wraith of mosquito netting which hung between them. I rolled back the coconut straw mattress and saw that the slats had been replaced with strings just strong enough to hold the mattress.

The minute I dropped my 190 pounds on the sack, the strings would break and old Norm Carlson would be sprawled on the floor with four bedposts in his lap.

But that wasn't all.

A black nylon fishing cord, almost invisible, led from the mattress up to the bunched mosquito net. From the net came frantic chittering sounds. I carefully parted the netting and found the heavy wood box suspended between the posts.

I figured out the mechanism; when the bed collapsed, the lid would be jerked off the box and the contents would be dumped into the bed with me.

And from the sound of it the contents were rats—probably those big brown ones the size of small dogs I'd seen playing tag in the open sewers around Bennerie.

I felt a shiver start down around my ankles and climb to my neck. Rats I liked no better than the next man. Sharing a bed with them—probably tangled up in the bedclothes and mosquito net so I could hardly move—with those damn rats slashing and clicking their sharp yellow teeth.

Hell, I'd have been thrown into a screaming panic.

Who . . .?

I walked to the window and looked down through the slanted louvres. It was like looking into the mouth of a coal mine, for Bennerie was black at night—black sand in the streets, black shingle shacks, black people.

I couldn't see them, but I heard the rustle of clothing and the low whisper of voices. I had a feeling the whole town had assembled to watch me perform my famous pratfall to the accompaniment of hysterical screams.

They were waiting, these laughing people, with the smiles pulling at the corners of their mouths, ready to laugh me out of town, out into the big, wide, dangerous world.

I had a pretty good idea who'd gimmicked up the bed and invited the multitudes. And I felt sorry for the son of sin. I pitied him the same way a professional pug pities a drunken boob who insists on stepping out into the alley. Because when it comes to gimmicks—

Well, you'll understand when I give you a quick rundown on how I happened to land in a crummy hotel in a third-class fishing village.

When I was a kid I was always

quick with my hands, quick as a mongoose. My favorite stunt was to get a bunch of guys together and go to the jewelry counter of a department store. With the guys crowded behind me so I couldn't be spotted from the rear, I'd talk to the salesgirl while I filled my pockets with junk jewelry.

The closer she watched me, the more I enjoyed making those rings and bracelets disappear. The real boot came when we'd walk out and I'd start unloading my pockets; the guys nearly flipped because they'd never been able to spot the take.

I was fast, yes, I could shuffle fifty-two with my left hand and stack dice with my right. I thought of being a magician, but what the hell! *Norman the Magnificent?*

And even in my teens I looked like a damn Swede who'd just crawled down out of a Bemidji fir tree—big, blond, blue-eyed, and not a sinister bone in my body. Besides, I liked excitement too well to learn a legitimate trade. Liked it? It was a monkey on my back, it was a ripping hunger for violence that tore me up inside and finally shaped my life.

In high school I was a trombone prodigy until I succumbed to this irresistible urge to throw a lighted firecracker down the bell of the sousaphone. They kicked me out but my family had the kind of patience that defies reason and so I went to a private school and wound up in college. That was during the days of the panty-raid epidemics.

I carved a niche in academic history by swiping the fire department's scaling ladders and becoming the first man to breach the fourth floor of the girl's dorm.

But my greatest scholastic achievement took place in the school library. I used to walk into the big reading room and see the vast block-long expanse of quiet, studious people, and it felt like spiders crawling up and down my spine.

I wanted to stand in the door and shout the filthiest four-letter obscenity I knew just to shatter those acres of quietitude. But in those days I was studying to become a mechanical genius, so I cut the word on tape and rigged up a selfpowered speaker inside an indestructible steel box.

I set it up one day when there were great groups of grinds cramming for finals. It took the old librarian five minutes to find the box while that obscenity roared through the hall one hundred times. It took her and a divinity student another five minutes to learn that smashing it on the floor wouldn't stop the sound of that horrible word, because the speaker was mounted on springs.

The dry-bone librarians and thesis-writers clapped their hands over their ears. The coeds squirmed in their chairs and gig-

gled, and a bunch of fraternity pledges figured it was some kind of pep rally and formed a snake dance through the reading room, chanting the *Word.*

Finally the head librarian wrapped the box in her shawl and tore out of the reading room with the *Word* rolling out behind her.

College seemed flat as 3.2 beer after that. I drifted west and started working for a guy in Utah who had a local racket in jukes, one-balls and slot machines. Since the place was, so to speak, on the front steps of Las Vegas, the big boys were trying to move in.

One blue-jawed gorilla used to hit my best spots just before a collection was due, play one pinball game, claim he was cheated, then tear hell out of the machine. We had a sixty-forty split with the proprietors, and some of the proprietors believed the syndicate when they promised a fifty-fifty split.

I wanted to rough up a few of the hoods, but my boss had marshmallow where his spine belonged. He was a family man who should've been running a corner grocery. So I gimmicked up one of the machines instead. It was an old-fashioned one-ball, and I tore out most of the guts and put in a 12-gauge shotgun loaded with 0-0 slugs.

I got my boss and we sat outside the joint in the car, waiting, but I wouldn't tell him what I'd done. When this gorilla pushed up the ball to start playing, the shotgun blasted out through the front of the machine.

It was heartwarming to see the gimmick come off so well; the guy kind of doubled over and his jacket fluffed out behind, so I figured part of the charge went right through him. I looked over to see if my boss was digging it, but his face had gone gray and shapeless like an oyster's. He couldn't talk, but he could drive.

He tore out into the country, stopped, and screeched to me: "Get out!"

"Why?" I said.

"You've bucked the syndicate," he said, "now you've marked us for a kill. They'll cut me into little pieces, they'll throw acid in my wife's face, they'll run over my kids with a truck and poison my dog. Good God, what kind of crazy kid are you?"

Well, it turned out he wasn't a family-type guy after all. I cooled him with my right fist and booted him out of his own car, then I found out he had a suitcase packed and a plane ticket to Mexico City. He was planning to leave his wife and kids behind.

That sort of teed me off and I banged him around a bit more—then took off.

As I drove east, playing like musical chairs with stolen cars, I began to worry about number one, Norm Carlson. The syndicate

would want to reward me for loading the pinball and the cops might want to confer with me about it too.

I figured so many people wanted me dead that maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to die. And be reborn, fresh and clean and legitimate.

I met my new self in the Five O'Clock club in Miami Beach. He was a big blond guy with a dumb sincere look in his eyes, and he might as well have worn a sign around his neck saying: I AM A SQUARE.

I plied him with Singapore Slings and he spilled his life story. His name was Morgan McClain and he was headed for the Windward Islands to visit his old uncle, whom he hadn't seen for fifteen years. The old uncle was losing money in the hotel business, but this Morgan character figured he could straighten that out because he'd helped his old lady run a boarding house in Grass Plains, Wisconsin. Since the old lady was dead, he no longer had any roots in Grass Plains.

He showed me his uncle's letter, and the words: *". . . So come on down, Morgan, and help me. There's trouble here which requires a young man's touch, but you'll find out when you come."*

I left him in my hotel room next morning with the same dumb, sincere look in his eyes . . . except that the eyes weren't seeing anymore now. There was a hole in his head and a gun in his right hand and a note to the effect that old Norm Carlson had decided to bring joy to the world by taking his own life.

I figured the hotel people would be in such a helluva hurry to get rid of this embarrassing corpse that nobody would take the trouble to learn that it wasn't really Norm Carlson.

II

MORGAN MCCLAIN'S identity fit me like a coat of skin except for the thumb print on his passport. I held my right thumb over a cigaret lighter until it crackled and spit like a hot dog, then I coated it with sour-smelling salve and wrapped it in a turban-sized bandage. It worked. During the trip to the Indies nobody asked to compare the prints; not even in Trinidad, which had the roughest customs inspection in the islands.

After I'd been sieved through Trinidad and headed north, I began to feel secure. But there was still that trouble mentioned in McClain's letter. With my phony identity hanging by a single thumbprint, I needed trouble like I needed another navel. I decided to play it cool until I found out what was bugging Uncle.

So it came to pass that when I stepped off the little coastal boat that had carried me from the island's capital down to Bennerie, I

spelled tourist with a capital T. From the bottom of my made-in-Mexico huaraches, through the Bermuda shorts, Hawaiian shirt, Japanese binoculars, and German camera, up to my peeling red nose, I was the all-American boob rubber-necking his way around the world.

I stood on the jetty with my pigskin suitcase beside me and studied the fifty-odd natives who'd come down to meet the coaster. They were clumped about thirty yards away, and they didn't seem to have a damn thing to do but gawk at me.

I gawked right back at them, the way I figured a tourist would do. They didn't seem curious, just tense and watchful, as though they expected something to happen.

Finally I crooked my finger at a boy who wore a buttonless khaki shirt and raveled shorts reaching to his knobby knees. I pointed to my bag. He split his face in a grin but didn't move. It was a little weird, so I lifted my eyes up above the crowd.

The mountains surged up just behind the town like a scenic backdrop, too jagged and too colorful to be real. Steep ravines choked with bamboo, a few pastel patches of bananas and an occasional breadfruit. Around the deep blue bay, coconut palms drooped over the black sand beach and fishermen's shacks came down to the water's edge.

Some naked kids were goofing around in the water in front of the shacks. Dirtpoor, dead place. If I'd been a real tourist, the place would have given me the willies.

But I was already thinking like a hotel owner, mulling over the words I'd put in the brochure: ". . . Dark, polynesian charm . . . picturesque natives who bathe *au natural* in the lagoon . . . in the unspoiled beauty of the primitive . . ."

But the first thing on my list was to have the coaster met by someone from the hotel. The bunch on the jetty hadn't moved, except maybe to stand a little flatter-footed. I whipped out my camera and took a picture. They didn't like that. I could tell from the way their faces set.

I didn't give a damn. I was a tourist.

I caught the eye of a smiling middle-aged man with creased trousers and shiny shoes. He stood a little ahead of the others, and he was the only one with shoes. I didn't like his smile.

"Boy!" I bellowed.

That wiped away his smile, as I knew it would. But he came. He was shirtless, built like an old-fashioned heating stove, only blacker. He had the look of a man who'd built up his massive muscles by carrying a big load of trouble all his life—flat nose, puffy ears, skin covered with pink scars, and a huge puckered furrow dividing

his stomach from one side to the other.

I pointed to my bag. "Carry this to the Vista Bleu Hotel."

He planted himself in front of me and looked me up and down. "Vista Bleu Hotel?" he said in sing-song English.

Verbally, I backed off and took another run at it. "You know Jude McClain? He runs it."

"Is he the white mister?"

I was getting impatient. The town was damn lucky to have even one hotel, let alone two. The man was having his little game.

"Yes, he's white," I said. "Can you carry the damn bag?"

"Mist' McClain dead, man. Fevah take he."

"Dead?"

A little ripple of shock ran through me. I tried to feel some grief for the man I didn't know, but I could only drum up a vague sympathy for anybody who had to take his last look at the world in Bennerie. A man should die with his eyes on beauty.

"When did he die?"

"Three . . . four day." The scar-bellied man looked sad, like a bereaved moose. "We have much fevah here. Ver' bad."

Yes, I could believe that. I could almost feel the germs crawling up my nose, along with the smell of fish and coconut husks and the rotten egg odor of sulphur which rolled down from the hills.

I looked up and saw the clouds marching toward the sea, stroking the jungle with curved feathers of rain. It pounded on the banana leaves with a distant rushing sound.

"Rain comin'," said Scar-belly with an air of pride, as though he'd set it up especially for my arrival. "I take you back to capital in my bus. Twenty dollah."

I was tempted. The town was weird-o, and the citizens were hardly strewing rose-petals in my path. But I had less than two hundred bucks in my pocket. Plus Morgan McClain's letter of credit on Grass Plains State Bank which might as well have been a ticket to the policeman's ball for all the good it did me. Plus his traveler's checks which I didn't dare sign. Besides, If Uncle was dead, the deal might be even sweeter.

"I'll go to the hotel," I said, then, because Scar-belly acted like some kind of local leader, I added, "Can you get someone to carry my bag?"

Without taking his eyes off me, his throat distended in a shout. "Godrig, *vini!*"

Then he spat on the jetty right beside my suitcase and walked away. I had a terrible urge to go after him and rub his face in it, but I remembered that I was a tourist. A tourist would have watched with his mouth hanging open like a Venus fly-trap, so that's what I did.

Godrig turned out to be the khaki-shirted boy I'd tried to call

before. He also wore a mustard-colored cap which enveloped his head and rested on his ears. As he grabbed the bag, I asked him what the hell was eating the scar-bellied man.

"He a Bajan," said the boy as if that were total explanation. "From Barbados."

I pondered what I knew about Barbadians. By reputation they were a cross between an Armenian rug-peddler, a gypsy horse-trader, and a Sicilian bandit. They made Port au Prince taxi-drivers look like philanthropists by comparison. They'd spread all over the Carribbean from their crowded little island, but they didn't cluster because they didn't trust each other. If two happened to wind up in the same town, they'd fight to see which one was going to run it.

"That all he does, drive a bus?"

"No 'sieur," said Godrig. "He have rum shop. Banana. Cocoa. Fishing boats."

Well, it looked like I'd bumped into the town's number one citizen. I should have known it by the shoes.

"What's his name?" I asked.

"Chokey," said Godrig, heaving the bag up with both hands.

"Chokey?"

"Chokey. He worked one time in Trinidad as wrestler. Choke he men to death."

Godrig started off the jetty ahead of me with the bag bumping against his knobby knees. I walked three paces behind and mused about Chokey. I had a feeling that sooner or later he and I would tangle. And for the first time in my life, I knew I couldn't afford a fight.

I nearly fell over a dwarf who stepped in front of me holding out his palm.

"Gimme sma' change," he demanded.

The arm was short and stubby, as though the forearm had been removed and the hand reattached to the elbow. He was staring straight at my belt buckle, and I saw that his white, rheumy eyes were sightless.

I felt the crowd watching me and decided it was time to do a little personal public relations.

"Small change?" I asked, palming a quarter inside my pocket. "You've got money. Look here."

Then I pulled that mouldy old trick of taking the money from his ear. The crowd sucked in its breath and moved closer. This was really the sticks; they'd never seen it before.

I pulled two more dimes and a nickel out of the blind dwarf's ear and dropped them into his hand. He wasn't sure what was happening but he wasn't about to move as long as the silver kept tinkling into his palm.

When I ran out of change I walked on. The crowd followed at a distance, but I sensed a new respect in their attitude. Before,

they'd watched to see what would happen to me; now they waited to see what I would do. The trick with the begger had given me the initiative.

Godrig walked beside me, his eyes shining like black marbles. "You stay long, 'sieur?"

"I don't know."

"If you stay, I work for you?" Godrig asked.

"We'll see."

"Man have no labor here. I be a good guide."

I told him again I'd see, and began concentrating on the town. A close look reinforced the impression of poverty I'd gotten from a distance: Black sand streets bordered by open sewers . . . sleek gray rats and gaunt dogs . . . naked kids with protruding drum-tight bellies . . . native women sitting spraddle-legged in fly-clouded doorways, smoking their pipes. It had all the gaiety and charm of a leper colony.

We walked across the *savanne* —a three-acre flat of black sand dotted with islands of scraggly grass and overhung with palms. It was used mostly by sand crabs, which scuttled sideways into their holes like saucers balanced on toothpicks.

In the center was an old guillotine with the ropes and the blade missing. I didn't know whether it was a mockup for tourists or a historical artifact, but it would be worth mentioning in the brochure: *"A relic of the days when Napoleon held sway. Twenty executions took place here."*

The Vista Bleu Hotel fronted the *savanne* which was at least better than fronting the fish market. An old-fashioned gallery extended all the way across the front, and if it had ever been painted, it was during the Hoover administration.

III

I GAVE GODRIG two bits and told him we'd case the town in an hour. Inside the lobby, I got a nose full of dusty, musty old age. There were two tables surrounded by rattan chairs—a pool table with a ping-pong net stretched across it—a massive roll-top desk in the corner. On the desk was tacked a sign advertising motor launch tours around the island. It was dated fifteen years ago.

I opened the register and saw that the last guest had been a one-nighter from Cayenne three days ago. I flipped back through the pages and saw that the hotel averaged one guest per week, few of them spending more than one night. That eliminated one possibility: that the hotel was making a profit and Uncle was being robbed by his help. There wasn't any profit to steal.

"You wish a room, sir?"

I gave a start and closed the register. The voice came from a

girl who stood behind a three-stool bar fronted by split bamboo.

I nodded, and she walked toward me leading with the pelvis the way West Indian women do. She wore a loose, dingy dress of gray and that was all; her breasts, high and wide apart on her chest, danced energetically beneath the material.

Without smiling, she placed a pen on the register and waited for me to sign. Her color was that of richly creamed coffee, shading to dark brown at the base of her neck and the inner curve of her elbow. Her hair fell onto her shoulders in thick, soft waves.

It occurred to me that she was beautiful, in that perishable way of a plum at the exact instant of ripeness, when you know you've got to grab it and eat before it goes sour. But I wasn't here for grabs.

"Who runs the hotel," I asked, scrawling John Smith's name on the register, "now that McClain's dead?"

"I am alone here now," she said. "I run the hotel."

"I mean—who owns it?"

She shrugged, and movement rippled the front of her dress. "Nobody. Gov-ment sell hotel ver' soon."

Oh yeah? I thought. I leaned on the desk and learned that her name was Carmen, that she was twenty, and she'd worked at the hotel since she was twelve. Then I threw her the loaded question.

"How did McClain happen to get killed?"

Her head jerked up and her startled blue eyes regarded me as though I'd just parachuted out of the sky in Russian uniform. "Who say he killed?"

"I met Frankenstein's brother on the jetty. He mentioned it." She looked puzzled, and I added: "Ugly character, got a scar that looks like somebody was trying to see through him. Name's Chokey."

"Chokey say he killed?" For a second she looked bewildered, almost frightened. Then her face stiffened. "He die of fever." She closed the register with a dusty snap. "Come. I show you the room."

I followed her up the wooden stairs and thought: Well, that's two votes for fever. I wasn't convinced yet, and I meant to keep asking.

I followed Carmen down a corridor paneled in native mahogany, unfinished and raw. She let me go ahead into my room and asked: "You wish tea on the gallery?"

"On the gallery?" I looked at my watch. Four o'clock. There'd be time to shower and look over the town before dark. "No, I don't think I—"

But she'd gone silently away on brown bare feet, apparently thinking I'd answered her question. Oh well, tea on the damn gallery. I sighed and started unbuttoning my shirt.

After my shower I prowled the other five rooms of the second story. The hotel was as dated as a buggy-whip factory: Porcelain bowls with pitchers in them, chain toilets that flushed with a sound like the Titanic going down with all hands, furniture which went back to Louis the Sixteenth. Each room smelled of dust and musty bedclothes and each bathroom had its own carpet of roaches.

I didn't blame Carmen for letting the dump get dirty; with one guest a week, why clean more than one room?"

I walked downstairs and heard Carmen making noises in the kitchen, no doubt rustling up my tea and crumpets. I tiptoed over to the desk and eased up the lid. Inside was a cuckoo's nest of papers and old pill bottles.

I probed the pigeonholes and turned up complaints, grocery and supply bills, letters revoking Jude McClain's credit and a notice of overdraft from Barclay's Bank. For the past two years, his account book showed little more than a record of payments to Chokey for rum, food and transportation, balanced against a dribble of money from guests.

Chokey's bills were far too high for one guest per week. Jude McClain had actually been working for Chokey and throwing in a bundle of his own. No wonder he'd called for help.

It looked like I'd have to sell a piece of the business for operating capital. I began looking for a deed or a will which would give me a clear title to the hotel. All I found were empty envelopes with the return address of a solicitor in the capital. Uncle's lawyer, probably. I stuck the envelope in my pocket, planning to visit the lawyer tomorrow.

After tea, I gave Godrig a chance to deliver on his boasted prowess as a guide. It wasn't his fault the place was dead as Pompeii. He bounced along ahead of me, his cap springing up and down on his ears, and proudly pointed out the Federal Garage, the police station, the Esso station, and the closed-up movie house whose playbill showed Johnny Weismuller as Tarzan.

At the edge of town, Godrig showed me a jungle path which used to lead to the hot springs where tourists used to bathe.

"Don't tourists bathe anymore?" I asked.

"Tourist no longer come to Bennerie."

There was the rub. People were knocking each other down to get to Barbados, Tobago, and Antigua, but they avoided Bennerie like a plague spot.

I told Godrig I wanted to visit the capital tomorrow, so he led me back to the Federal Garage. The owner crawled out from under a Vauxhall and shook hands. He called himself Panama and was

trying to grow a beard. Since his whiskers were sparse, the beard trailed off into a goatlike wisp which waved when he talked.

"You live at the hotel?" he asked when I told him I wanted a taxi.

I said yes and shrugged, "Then Chokey take you."

"Why should he?"

"He do everything for hotel. Drive car, supply rum, fish, banana, everything."

Time, I decided, to break the monopoly. "Chokey's a big man," I said casually, "I can see why people don't like to take away his business."

The wisp of beard jutted stiffly. "I take you," said Panama. "For ten dollah."

"Chokey wanted twenty."

"He cheat you. I do not."

Progress, I thought. The capital was a two-hour drive, so I arranged to be picked up at seven in the morning. As I was leaving, I noticed a pile of gaily-painted oil drums in the corner, some whole, some cut in half, and some cut in quarters to form flat pans. Welded seams divided the tops into separate notes. Each drum carried the words, THE GAY BUCCANEERS.

"Steel band," explained Panama. "We used to play at hotel on Saturday nights."

I asked why he'd quit.

"People stop coming to hotel. We play good, too."

There it was again. The place had boomed, then busted for no apparent reason. I decided to give THE GAY BUCCANEERS a chance to make a comeback as soon as I got the hotel firmly under control. It would make another item for the brochure: *Savage steel-band rhythms.*

Back in the street, I saw that darkness had come like the slam of a closet door. I dogged Godrig's footsteps back to the hotel and wondered how the hell he could see. I saw only the red glow of cigarets in shack doorways. I heard an occasional burble of patois and the singing whine of a cutlass on stone as the men honed their tools for tomorrow's work.

My skin prickled with the awareness that I was being watched from those black doorways. I was a strange dog in an unknown land, I'd better go slow and easy.

Dinner restored my spirits. I ate alone, bathed in the white light of a Coleman lantern hung on an overhead rafter.

Carmen, shuttling between my table and the kitchen in her old gray dress, told me the town's diesel generator had been knocked out when an off-course hurricane had backhanded the island on its way north. That was five years ago.

The food was strictly West Indian: parrotfish fried in coconut oil and onions, breadfruit boiled and palatable as sawdust cakes,

sugared plantain and Nescafé which must have washed ashore during World War II. The menu would have to be changed; Americans will eat foreign food as a novelty, but for daily fare give them their hamburger, sirloin, apple pie and potato salad. And it was a safe bet it would take American dollars to put this place back on its feet.

I watched Carmen take down the dimming Coleman and start pumping up the tank. Her efforts produced a frenzy of fascinating twitches and jiggles beneath the gray dress. The hem was six inches higher in back than in front, and when she stood on a chair to hang up the lantern, I saw that she had rounded calves and full-fleshed thighs and—everything else that can make a man forget what his main purpose should be.

She had a good build, which is more than you can say for most West Indian women. She apparently washed the dress by beating it on rocks in the river. In places it was worn as threadbare as cheesecloth, and I could see the glossy sheen of naked flesh backlighted by the lantern.

I decided to keep Carmen on in some capacity or other. But I'd have to play at Pygmalion, train her to:

(a) Speak better English.

(b) Smile, instead of approaching guests with the wary look of someone approaching a cow caught between the slats of a fence.

(c) Put on underwear, particularly a brassiere. I would regret the last part personally. They were such a lively, bouncing distraction to the eye. But I wanted the family trade, so the headlights had to go. At least during working hours.

After dinner I sat at the bar and tried to make a connection with Carmen. It was a fiasco. She stood at the end of the bar playing solitaire with a limp and raddled deck of blue-backed Bicycles, leaving her game only to refill my glass. When I tried small talk, she answered without looking up.

The game was one we called Concentration back in the states. She called it "Memory." The gimmick was to lay all the cards face-down on the table, then pick them up in pairs. Miss pairing up and it's the other guy's turn.

At first it's only luck when you pair up, but after a few plays you begin to memorize the location of the cards. It's strictly a competitive game, and the sight of Carmen playing alone made me as restless as hell.

I eased my fifth rum-and-ginger past my tonsils and asked when she closed the bar.

"When you finish," she said.

I squirmed in my seat, certain that if I sat there til dawn without speaking, so would she—playing that stupid solitary game until it

drove me out of my mind wondering what kick she got out of it.

I slid off the stool. "Good night," I said.

"Wait. You know this game?" she asked.

I nodded, and she said, "Let's play for drinks."

I was surprised to hear her come on so strong, so suddenly. But I climbed back on my stool and she handed me the limp, warm cards.

"You beat them," she said.

I frowned, and she made fluttery motions with her hands, pursing her lips in search for words. "Confuse the cards."

I understood then and confused the cards as well as I could. You couldn't shuffle the damn things. It was like shuffling fabric samples. I laid them down and she made her first play. Usually, the game doesn't get in gear before four plays, until the players have time to memorize the location of a few cards.

But she snatched up at least a third of the deck on her first run. I raised a queen, lifted a nine, and let them fall. She snatched up another five pairs, and there were only twenty-two cards on the board.

"Your game," I said, pulling out a bill. "What'll you drink?"

"Nothing," she said. "I take the money."

I damn near fell off my stool. The lowest B-girl in the states would've had grape juice. But I let it pass, feeling my excitement rise. She was cheating me.

I suggested another game just to see how far she'd go. This time I led off, but she beat the Bermuda socks off me in six plays. I still didn't know how the cards were marked—but I knew damn well they were.

My thoughts jumped forward: if she didn't have skill enough to conceal her cheating, she wouldn't know how to mark a deck so well that even I couldn't spot the marks. So she had an accomplice, and all this solitaire was just practice in memorizing the deck.

Then it struck me that if she'd cheat guests, she wouldn't be above a little hustling on the side. One thing sure, the way she wore that grey dress wasn't calculated to drive a man into the arms of another woman.

I walked around the bar and spread my hand over the small of her back. It was warm and muscular and curiously alive, and a rather pleasant surprise after the flat, bland backs of stateside women.

"Close the joint," I said, pressing a firm kiss on the base of her chocolate neck. "We'll grab a bottle and go upstairs. I know another game."

She shook her head no. Then, as though to prove that she knew what I had in mind, she added: "You have no room for me in your bed."

IV

AND THAT'S HOW I happened to look at my bed and discover the booby trap. With me as the booby.

Now, as I stood by the window, I was sure of one thing. The man who'd marked the cards for Carmen was the one who'd gimmicked my bed. And she'd kept me at the bar to give him time.

But I wondered . . . was any woman stupid enough to cheat so obviously? Or to make a slip of the tongue so garish that it tipped off the joke? It didn't seem possible—but the only alternative supposition was that she was playing a double game.

I blew out the lamp, leaving the room in darkness. Outside the whispering stopped. Let the ugly son and his stupid or too-clever accomplice wait.

I went looking for Carmen, but the hotel was dark and empty. I found only Godrig, who materialized out of the darkness of the hall, eye-balls white beneath the great bulk of his cap. I caught him roughly and asked him what he was doing here.

"I wait—see if you need something."

"Okay. I need to know if anyone's gone into my room."

He shook his head too quickly and I said, "No liars work for me."

He spoke then. "Chokey go in."

Chokey! The man I'd met on the jetty, the man with the gut-buster of a scar, the Boss Tweed of Bennerie.

"What does he have to do with Carmen?"

"Carmen! She live with Chokey."

The answer staggered me. My mind filled with a vision of ugliness, that lovely young yellow girl in the arms of huge, squat ugly Chokey. I didn't dwell on it long. Beauty and the Beast was an old story, and Carmen's sex life was none of my business. Chokey was.

I squatted in the hall and pumped Godrig. The kid couldn't remember when Chokey had first come to town. It seemed that he'd always been there, rocking the citizenry with his wonderful sense of humor. Since life in the West Indies is vicious and cruel, and death was sudden, Chokey's jokes were also vicious and cruel with more than a touch of the gallows.

Once he'd switched the tags on the coffins of a man and woman who died in the local hospital. The switch was discovered when the man's brother prepared to transfer him to a better coffin, and people were kind of sorry. They'd wanted to see what Chokey had in mind after the bodies were underground. Later, the man's brother moved away, and Chokey goodnaturedly bought his fishing boat.

Another time, Chokey salted a man's yard with gold-plated coins. The man thought he'd found bur-

ied Spanish treasure and began digging feverishly day and night. A huge crowd was there when the man's house caved into his excavation, and Chokey revealed the plant. The man soon moved away in shame, and Chokey generously took over the man's rumshop. And he'd bought the bus from a man who—

I interrupted. "Does he trick tourists?"

Yes, said Godrig. He particularly loved to find one of the *blancs* setting under the stately, innocent-looking tree which grew on the *Savanne*. Manchineel, he would say, it kill you. Most tourists had heard vague, terrible stories about manchineels—that they exuded a deadly vapor which would kill if you got close, that a taste of the poison apples brought agonizing death.

The sap *did* raise blisters, and the apples *were* deadly if you ate, say a bowlful, but few knew that. They'd ask Chokey what to do, and he'd reply that immediate immersion in sea water was their only hope. The tourists would run and plunge into the bay, while the village roared.

To the female of the tourist species, he discussed Bennerie's high rate of typhoid, and amoebic dysentery. The woman would walk through the town as though through a haunted forest; they'd coat their food with sulfa powder and cloud their drinking water with halezone tablest. And the village snickered.

The men he told of the deadly serpent, *fer-de-lance,* which slithered down from the mountains at night and lurked in gutters and behind doors. Chokey would rent the tourist a pair of bulky-leather leggings guaranteed to turn the fangs of the *fer-de-lance,* which in fact avoided humans even more than vice versa.

The village would grin as the leather-legged tourist clumped wearily through the streets.

I had to admit that Chokey was smart. Most victims wouldn't realize they'd been tricked; they'd just have that strange, exasperating sense of being laughed at. Those who caught on would hardly go home and tell their friends they'd been suckered.

But they'd be sure to curse the name of Bennerie to their friends and travel agents, because if there's one thing the American tourist hates worse than no hot water, it's being laughed at by natives. After all, he came to laugh at them!

Well, I had to reverse the trend. To Godrig I said: "Chokey has a bus, right?"

"*Weh.* Called Sparrow-on-the-way."

"Where does he park it?"

"Always, by side the jetty."

I went back into my room and used a razor blade to cut loose the box which contained the rats. I

could hear the people outside moving restlessly. Probably some of them had begun to go home. Well, they could still have their little joke.

Godrig led me out the back door and through the alleys. We made it to the bus without being seen. I laid the box on the floorboards, draped the cord over the steering wheel, and tied it to the inside door handle.

When Chokey opened his door next morning, the lid would come off the box. And Chokey would get his rats back.

Back in my room, I chuckled myself to sleep.

Early next morning Carmen served my breakfast in silence and that suited me. I had plans for her, but I needed the proper equipment.

Panama arrived on schedule, his beard drooping. As he wrestled his little Morris panel truck into the street, I saw that Chokey's bus was no longer at the jetty. I asked where he'd gone.

"Hauling banan'," said Panama. "The boat coming in, and he must get his stems ready to ship, get them to buying stations."

"No trouble when he left?"

"He leave early. Nobody see him go."

I felt cheated, but I let it pass. There'd be other chances.

I watched Panama fight his vehicle up out of the valley and onto the one-way road to the capital. Panama had named his bus "I Love You" and painted the words above his windshield in pink and blue. At each sugar-cane settlement, kids gathered at the side of the road and shouted in chorus: "I love you! I love you!"

Panama growled at them. Whatever sentiment had impelled him to name his bus was now totally absent. He drove with an icy rage, fighting for dominance. He jammed the gears, jerked the clutch, and twisted the wheel as though trying to break a spirited horse.

Finally I asked him what was the matter.

He chewed on it awhile, then spit it out. "Rats!" He held up his arm and I saw the rose-colored nicks and scratches on his black skin. "When I open the door they come out of that!"

He jerked his thumb toward the back seat. I knew, even before I looked, that I'd see the wood box I'd left in Chokey's bus. *Clever devil!* He'd discovered my gimmick and used it on Panama, probably because Panama was stealing his business.

I cracked my knuckles and thought of revenge: I could capture a *fer-de-lance,* put it in his tool kit, fix it so he'd have a flat tire, then when he started to put on his spare . . . Or I could put a moray eel into his commode . . . centipedes in his pillow . . . prussic acid in his shower head.

I pushed away these pleasant thoughts. If Chokey died violently, there'd be an investigation and someone might want to check my thumbprint. I had to dream up something harmless, yet strong enough to put Chokey down for good, drive him out of Bennerie in disgrace.

In the Capital, it was simple to find Uncle's solicitor. Even simpler when I said I was Morgan McClain. Fortunately I had Uncle's letter, which was damn near as good as a will. He said I could practically regard the hotel as mine, if I wanted it. In ten days the government would have sold it at public auction, and for a pittance, since it was losing money. It wasn't hard for me to figure who planned to be the successful bidder.

The solicitor assured me that he'd work quietly to get me clear title and I managed to get away at ten o'clock. I bought a needle and thread, a pack of Anchor Specials I didn't intend to smoke, and a deck of blue-backed Bicycles.

On the way back to Bennerie, I kept shuffling the deck, twisting and crackling and rubbing it on the floorboards. I hated to be cheated at cards. Nothing makes me angrier.

As I rode, I chatted with Panama about Chokey. Panama was garrulous, having waited for me in a rumshop. He said that Chokey had come to Bennerie ten years ago, flat broke after losing his job at the refinery in Aruba.

"Was that when the hotel business started going bad?" I asked.

"No, four year ago, when Mist' McClain get sick, business go bad."

"Sick? How?"

"He have stomach-ache. Fever. Hair all come out. I think maybe he eat bad parrotfish. I think so—yes."

"Parrotfish?" I felt a twist of nausea, remembering that I'd had parrotfish the night before. "How'd it get bad?"

"Well—you know, parrotfish sometimes eat seaweed around sunken ship. Take into its body the metal, *kuiv,* how you say, like in pennies?"

"Copper?"

"*Weh.* Copper, so—"

"Who was cooking?"

"Carmen. She always cook there. Before that her mother cook there."

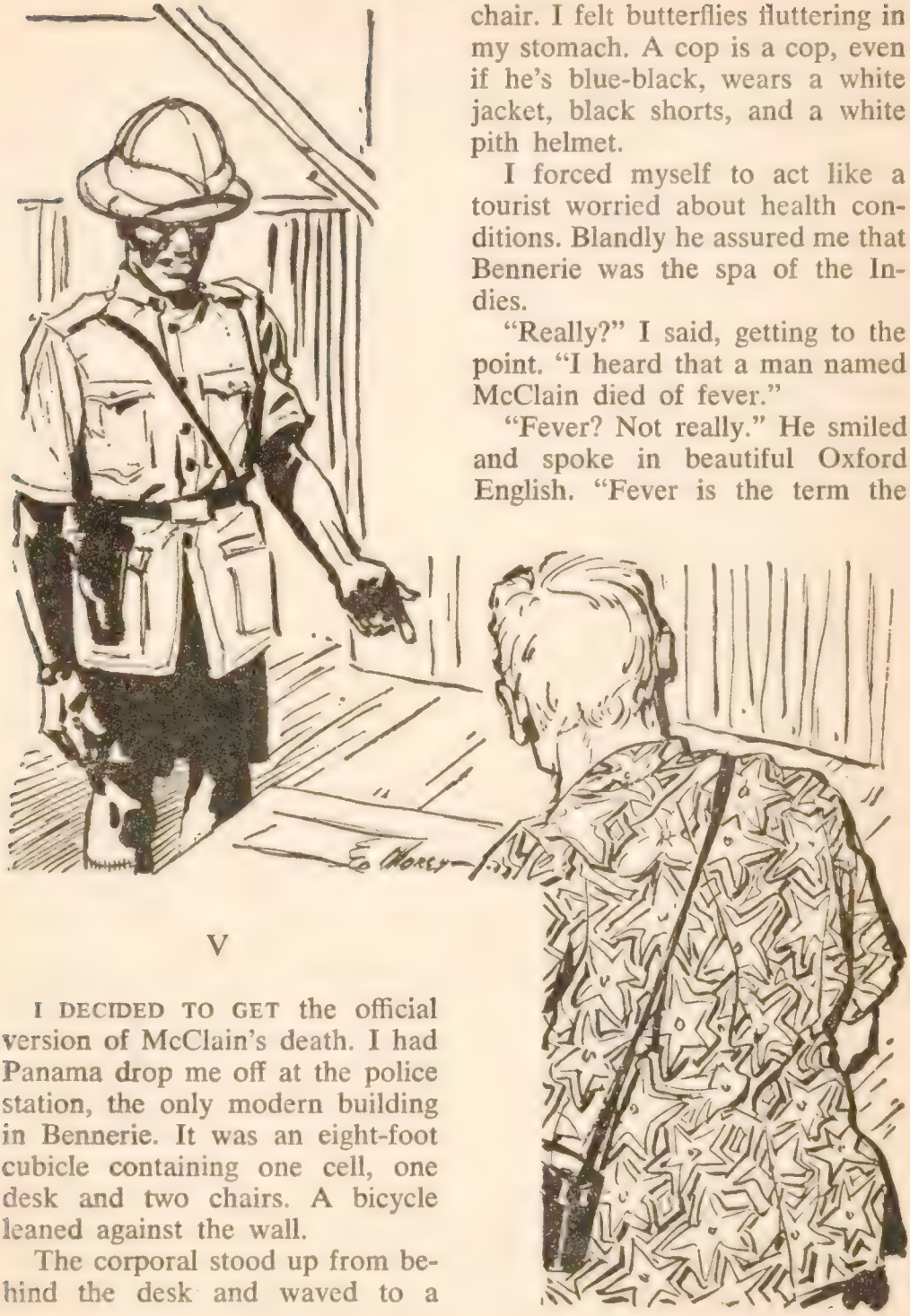
"And Chokey supplied the fish?"

"*Weh.* He have that."

"How'd McClain die?"

Panama looked at me quickly, then shrugged.

I let the conversation lapse. The more of McClain's death that bubbled to the surface, the more the deal stank. If I happened to get myself involved in a murder investigation, subpoenas and everything, I'd be better off taking the next plane out.



chair. I felt butterflies fluttering in my stomach. A cop is a cop, even if he's blue-black, wears a white jacket, black shorts, and a white pith helmet.

I forced myself to act like a tourist worried about health conditions. Blandly he assured me that Bennerie was the spa of the Indies.

"Really?" I said, getting to the point. "I heard that a man named McClain died of fever."

"Fever? Not really." He smiled and spoke in beautiful Oxford English. "Fever is the term the

V

I DECIDED TO GET the official version of McClain's death. I had Panama drop me off at the police station, the only modern building in Bennerie. It was an eight-foot cubicle containing one cell, one desk and two chairs. A bicycle leaned against the wall.

The corporal stood up from behind the desk and waved to a

people use for any disability not traceable to old age, drowning, snake-bite, or a cutlass drawn across a jugular vein."

He looked thoughtful, then shrugged. "McClain was not a well man for a good many years. Like all white men, he had a delicate nature. Death to them comes suddenly, like walking off a cliff, particularly to one with McClain's habits. You could call it fever. I call it dissipation."

He lay one hand upon the other and smiled up at me. "Was there anything else, Mister Smith?"

So the cops didn't question McClain's death. Good. The corporal seemed to be expecting me to say more. Then, quite suddenly, I remembered the rats. A typical tourist would bitch to the law about rats in his bed. And so I did.

He was sympathetic, amused. Too bad about Chokey. But he was harmless. It lay within his memory that Chokey used to solve his problems with a cutlass. One could be thankful that he'd gotten a woman and settled down.

"Not always settled," I said.

"Oh—yes, you refer to the scar. I believe that was his last fight. A young seaman had taken an interest in Carmen when she was sixteen, perhaps seventeen. He had found Chokey without his cutlass and given him a slash intended to kill. True, it had opened up his belly, but Chokey had made his way to his bus, holding his stomach together with one hand the way you hold a torn bag to keep the beans from spilling out.

"He got his cutlass and went looking for the seaman, but he'd already come to me and given himself up. He was glad when he got ten years. He didn't want to meet Chokey again."

He smiled. "So we're happy that Chokey plays jokes instead of swinging his cutlass. It provides some amusement."

"At the expense of tourists."

"Oh really, I wouldn't say—"

"Why do you think nobody comes here? Hell, you're cutting your own throats!"

The corporal's smile grew strained. "Perhaps, after so many centuries, we welcome a chance to do it ourselves."

Suddenly I knew I'd gone far enough. I turned to go and he called after me.

"May I see your passport, Mister Smith?"

My legs told me to run like hell, but my mind told me that the only way I could leave the island unnoticed was by swimming. And I was a lousy swimmer.

I turned, drew myself up, and assumed a look of patient exasperation. "It's in the hotel. I have a one-month visa for entertainment purposes. Only one day has been used."

His smile was completely gone now. For a second I thought he'd tell me to go to the hotel and get

it, but he only said: "Let us hope nothing happens to cut short your stay."

Nothing would have suited me more than to bow and take my leave, but I knew if I let this man put me down, I was through in Bennerie.

"Like what?" I asked.

"Hmmm—disturbances." He moved some papers on his desk. "Assault on a local citizen, that sort of thing."

"Have I the right to defend myself?"

"That is what the police are for," he said.

You smug hypocrite, I thought. For a second I forgot that I was a 24-carat phony myself. I blazed with righteous anger. I banged my fist into my palm and raised my voice.

"Have I the right to defend myself? What am I supposed to do when a man spits at my feet? Laugh?"

"Of course not, but—"

"Or when he sneaks into my room and puts rats in my bed. Congratulate him on his fine sense of humor?"

"No, but—"

"Or when he tries to cheat me on taxi fare, then turns his filthy rats on the man who gives me a fair price?"

"Please! Please!" The corporal smoothed his papers, his hands trembling. "Chokey will do nothing to harm you physically. That is all I can guarantee. Now if you don't mind—"

I left while I was ahead. I stopped a block away and looked back at the white concrete building. The corporal was wheeling his bicycle out in the street. I watched him straddle it and pedal away in the opposite direction. I had a feeling he was going to report to Chokey.

I spent the afternoon building myself a reputation. I fixed my jacket up with a false lining, then had Godrig take me to a farm on the edge of town. There I bought a baby agouti—a small rodent that looks like a red jack-rabbit with its butt shaved clean, with a head like a squirrel and ears like a cat. Back in front of the rumshop, I drew a laugh from the idlers when I pulled the 'guoti out of Godrig's cap.

A fat woman walked past with a pannier of mangos on her head. I reached in and took out two green lizards, a small lobster, and a soldier crab. The blind dwarf waddled up and I squeezed a quarter and three pennies from his nose. I borrowed the cutlasses and began spinning them in the air and catching them by the handles.

As I performed, I felt behind the surface reactions of these people. I got the feeling that, sure, they liked me—but Chokey was top banana in Bennerie. If I could beat him, okay, I was in. If not—

well, there was no point in backing a losing horse.

This was the kind of competition I liked. Chokey's weaknesses were glaring:

(a) His hold on the people depended on his ability to keep them amused. They didn't really like him. If he became the butt instead of the joker, he'd be finished.

(b) Carmen was his tool, taken when she was young. But she was no longer young; already she'd shown stirrings of rebellion when she gave me that hazy warning about the bed.

Since Chokey was gone, I decided to work on Carmen first. I went back to the hotel, and she served my dinner with a wax-like neutrality which was neither hostile nor loving, but rather the emotional limbo of an actor awaiting a cue.

I wasn't sure whether to curse her for setting up the bed gag, or thank her for trying to warn me, so I let it lay.

Afterwards, I suggested a game of "Memory." Okay, that was fine with her. We played in silence, like two strangers waiting on a slow elevator. She won two games, and we began talking. It went like this:

"Why do you help Chokey with his tricks?"

"The man rules. I must do as he say."

"You like Chokey?"

"A girl must have pride. Without man, a girl have no pride."

"What if another man came along? Would you leave Chokey?"

She looked at me beating the cards. "I leave Chokey when he dead. When I put him in the ground and cover his body with conch. Then I leave Chokey."

I let it pass and upped the ante. A woman is always, at the time, true until death. She won another game, and I noticed the quick, gleeful way she grabbed the cash. She had that temporary insanity known as gambling fever. I could even smell it. By now she'd ratholed about fifteen bucks of mine. I said I'd bet ten dollars. If she lost, she would come up to my room.

For the first time, she smiled. "Chokey find me there and split your face."

"He's hauling bananas."

"Maybe—maybe he come home early."

I pulled out a ten dollar bill and laid it on the bar. "Where do people go who are in love, who have no house?"

She eyed the bill. "To the beach."

"All right. Ten dollars against the beach."

She didn't take her eyes off the bill as she said: "Beat the cards."

I shuffled quickly, then palmed the old deck and started dealing the one I'd bought in the capital. I was gratified to see that the artificial aging process had worked.

They looked as bad as the old deck.

When I finished, she bent over confidently to begin her play, then froze like a dog on point. She looked at the cards for a full minute, then raised her head and regarded me accusingly with those curious, piercing blue eyes.

"Your play," I said.

She bent her head; though she knew what had happened, she was going to bluff it through. I admired her for that—but it did her no good. When I had twenty-six cards, she had only eighteen, and I knew she'd been counting.

She rose from the stool and said in a flat, neutral voice, "Wait here for me."

VI

CARMEN WENT INTO the kitchen and I waited, nursing my drink. After five minutes, I got up and went into the kitchen. It was empty, the back door ajar.

I swore silently. Here I stood, like a snipe hunter holding the bag, a victim of the back-door gambit, the oldest evasion known to man. Anger made my face hot, and I started out the door, determined to find her.

I ran smack into Godrig, who stammered that he'd take me to Carmen.

I followed, mentally retracting my unkind thoughts of Carmen. Naturally, she didn't want to be seen walking to the beach with me.

I followed the boy through the black sand streets; through the thick, suffocating darkness. I smelled the sea and heard the faint whisper of surf, and only the loosening of sand under my feet told me we were now on the beach. I had lost sight of Godrig, but I kept walking.

Suddenly I ran into a shape that was black and meaty. I put out my hands and felt warm,

naked shoulders. A body pressed toward me, and breasts like two great soft pillows flattened against my chest.

"What you want, *blanc?*"

A deep, throaty voice with a mocking twist on the last word, *white.* I mumbled, "pardon me," and turned away.

Behind me she repeated, "Parn me," and laughed.

I took two steps back the way I'd come. A pair of thin arms encircled my neck and another warm, yielding body blocked my way.

"Carmen?" I whispered.

There was no answer; only the tight clinging, and the amorous movements of a woman who was taking the initiative by fiercely embracing me. It could have been Carmen.

I ran my hand down her back, down her thigh, and suddenly I knew—you can usually tell—that she wasn't Carmen.

I threw her away as hard as I could, and behind me she said, "Parn me."

This time there was a loud roar of laughter; the laughter of many people. It was a setup. I clenched my fists, wanting to charge into the darkness and lay about me with my fists and feet.

"Is Chokey here?"

Silence, then: "He haul banana."

Laughter. I knew it was Chokey who spoke, and I dashed toward the voice. My hands gripped air.

"He haul banana," said the voice behind me.

I made myself stand still. I could see nothing. In a moment I could be lying on the sand wearing a red necktie of blood and nobody would know who had done it, and nobody would care. Even if I managed to inflict damage, there was the corporal and the law at my back.

I got away from the beach and found the street. Darkness was choking me when I pushed open the door of a tiny rumshop. There was a single counter backed by shelves of bully beef and unmarked bottles of rum. Nobody was there but an old woman in a beret standing behind the bar. Relieved, I stepped forward and ordered a shot.

It was the worst I'd ever tasted —white stuff with a strong smell of fusil oil—but I threw down two shots and was starting a third when someone pinched my butt. A woman said, "Parn me," then giggled.

I turned in rage, recognizing the voice of the thin woman from the beach. She was clothed now in a ragged dress which looked like something the Salvation Army had discarded. Her chin was split by a cutlass scar that ran from the corner of her mouth like bright red drool. Behind her I saw the fat one—a nearly bald woman with a huge flat nose. Chokey had un-

doubtedly dug up the ugliest young-old hags in Bennerie.

I nearly drew back to hit them, then I saw that the joint had begun to fill up. People were slipping through the door and sidling along the wall to make room for more. Finally Chokey stood in the door, filling it from side to side like a huge black frog.

Time, I decided, to recapture the initiative. I smiled at the thin woman. "Hello, baby," I said, smacking her lightly on the hip. "Can I buy you lovely ladies a drink?"

That threw them for a second, but they nodded. While they were being served, I noticed that the faces in the room had lost that swollen look of suppressed laughter. They were waiting to see what I'd do next. Even Chokey was leaning back against the wall, arms folded across his barrel chest.

I spied Godrig trying to hide under his hat and crooked my finger at him. He shuffled forward, his eyes round, stammering something about being forced to call for me.

I cut him short and told him to get me a twenty-foot length of rope, a dry cane stalk, and a mirror. He nodded once and tore out. I stood up.

"I like jokes," I said, flatly.

The crowd fell silent.

"Chokey knows many jokes," I added. "Stupid, small-island jokes."

A few people gasped, and there was a shifting of feet. To call something small-island was grossly insulting, like calling a southerner in the States a cracker or a redneck. All eyes turned to Chokey, whose chest swelled out angrily.

"What you mean?"

"Your kind of jokes used to be popular where I came from," I said, talking directly to Chokey. "No more. People got smarter, learned new jokes. They take more than the ability to lie. They take brains."

I pointed to my head. "Brains."

If Chokey had been white, his face would probably have turned deep purple. As it was, he swelled up like a frog in mating season.

"I can do anything you do!"

"Can you?" I asked. "Can you hang yourself and live to tell it?"

Chokey's face wrinkled and he looked awkward and uncomfortable standing in the door. Finally, when all eyes were turned to him and he had to speak, he said, "Can you?"

"Of course," I said.

At this point Godrig shuffled in with the mirror, rope and cane stalk. I climbed onto the bar and held the items in the air, explaining that I would wrap the rope about my neck with the cane stalk inside it. When I jumped, the rope would pass through my neck and break the cane stalk.

The crowd moved in, and I began to get nervous—not about the

crowd, but about the stunt. I'd pulled it before, sure, but only with a pencil, a piece of string, and a soda straw. This is the way it works: Say you've got the pencil standing up. Stretch the string behind the pencil, bring the two ends around in front, cross the right over the left, then wind the two ends around behind the pencil.

Now comes the straw. Run the left end under and back over the straw, then bring it back to the front of the pencil. Do the same with the right end, but be sure to keep it above the left end. With both ends around in front, cross them again, keeping the left end of the string above the right.

When you bunch them all together, it looks like you've just wrapped the string around the pencil four times. Grab the two ends, give a quick jerk and *spfft!* The straw breaks and there's the string stretched taut beside the pencil. Astound your friends and consternate your enemies.

I'd always thought it would be an even better gimmick to put the thing around my neck, but I'd never taken the time to work out the details. Now I wished I had.

Godrig held the mirror while I worked. I did the exact opposite of what I'd done with the pencil. Left over right—in front—left around cane stalk and return, right around cane stalk above left and return—left over right in front.

This was important. If I got the right over the left, instead of vice versa, I'd have a closed loop around my neck and there I'd hang—a million laughs, all on me.

I didn't look in the mirror. That was a red herring, strictly for Chokey's benefit.

When I finished, the rope formed a thick four-strand coil around my neck with the cane stalk stuck up behind my head and down my back. I had the two women tie the two ends of the line to the joists on each side of the rumshop. They stretched the rope so tight I could feel the veins stand out in my temples.

I stood for a moment on the four-foot bar with my head inside the loop, feeling like an old pair of overalls hung on a clothesline. The crowd looked like a box-full of chocolate Easter eggs—with eyes.

I took a deep breath and jumped. A horrible, tearing pain in my throat—a split-second of suspension—a snap! Then my feet thumped on the floor.

I sank weakly to my knees, then rose and converted it into a bow. Behind me the rope hung slack above the bar and the cane-stalk lay in two pieces.

I walked to where Chokey was standing with his face wrinkled into a thoughtful frown. My throat was aching so that I couldn't speak, so I merely waved at the rope and waited.

"Tomorrow," he growled. "Tomorrow I do the trick."

"Tomorrow," I croaked out. "All right. Meanwhile, let's be friends. Have a cigaret."

I pulled out the package of Anchor Specials I'd gimmicked. It was a simple thing. A white thread ran from my shirt button down the sleeve of my jacket, penetrated the top of the pack and hooked to the bottom of a cigaret.

The result was weird. As Chokey reached for the pack, I stretched out my arm and tightened the thread. A cigaret rose slowly from the pack.

Chokey's hand froze, then dropped to his side. I stuck the pack in my pocket and walked out. I could hear derisive, heart-warming laughter behind me.

Later I lay in the dark and thought about what would happen when Chokey tried the trick. He would use the mirror and thus reverse the gimmick. Since his neck would be inside the closed loop, he would hang there, slowly strangling, until I ran forward and cut him down. He wouldn't be harmed, but he'd be through in Bennerie.

I wondered who would take over his bus, his bananas, and his boats. I felt sure those boats did double-duty as rum-runners, judging from the brands he supplied the hotel. Well, to the victor belonged the spoils. And Carmen? I had a sense of something unfinished.

I stiffened as the door opened. I'd left Godrig in the hall to warn me if Chokey tried to break in. Either Godrig had gone to sleep, or—

It wasn't Chokey. It was Carmen. I asked her what she wanted and her voice sounded subdued and humble. "You know—they laugh at Chokey now because he cannot do trick."

When I said nothing, she went on. "He have pride, much pride. He live by pushing. Push everybody. Now they laugh and they push. Push him out of this town."

"So?"

There was a moment of silence, then the bed sagged as she sat down. "Will you give me that trick?"

"No."

She went on as though she hadn't heard. "You give him trick, he no longer bother you. Keep it, I don't know, maybe he kill you?"

"As he did McClain?" I asked her.

There was a long silence. "Chokey tell me the powder make him sleep. I didn't know. I know McClain have to sleep when man come with box."

"How big a box?" I asked.

"Small box. He come often."

So Chokey was in dope, too. Rum, dope. It shouldn't be difficult to take over both. "When does the man come?"

"Each month, two month. Before banana boat come."

Ah—the man from Cayenne, of course. Then Chokey somehow got the stuff back out in the banana boat. A sweet deal. "Did Chokey send you for the trick?"

"He try it, but could not work it. He tell me, maybe I play cards with you for the trick."

"You want to?" I said, smiling in the darkness.

"No, you beat me. If I give you money back—"

I laughed out loud.

Silence, then a whispering sound as the old gray dress came off. Her breath blew hot in my ear. "You give me trick?"

"Later," I said, palming that lively, muscular spot in the small of her back, now unimpeded by clothing. "Later . . ."

VII

CARMEN DIDN'T SHOW next morning, so Godrig rustled up coffee, some pale-yolked eggs, and sweet rolls which helped kill the bitter taste of the coffee.

I drank a second cup on the gallery, feeling a deep inner peace. My problems seemed small, now: money . . . guests . . .

"Sieur?"

I looked down, and there stood Carmen in the street. She no longer wore the old gray dress; now it was bright yellow, with red, high-heeled shoes that stuck out behind like those worn by Minnie Mouse.

"What?" I asked with a hint of impatience. Now that passion was gone, I felt nothing for her.

"Chokey down at the jetty," she said. She seemed eager to please, but uncertain how to do it.

I decided I liked her better aloof. It occurred to me that last night she'd passed that moment of ripeness. Now she stood on the far side of beauty. In a year, two years, she'd become either too fat or too scrawny.

"Yes?" I heard the hubble-bubble-hubble sounds of patois coming from the jetty. People were passing, headed that way. "He's doing the trick?"

She nodded. "You coming see? You walk with me?"

I smiled, knowing what would happen. I'd used the pencil to teach her the trick and she'd learned by rote, not understanding the principle of the spirals. I'd told her to tell Chokey to practice that way, then use the mirror in the actual trick.

"I'll be down later," I said.

"Ah—but Chokey not satisfy to do the trick as you did. He do it bigger, better than you. Make you look small again. Better you come, watch with me."

This I had to see. I got up and walked down. Carmen tried to walk beside me, but she couldn't handle the high-heeled shoes. She dropped behind, mincing along

the sand streets like a horse walking on frozen snow.

I felt a prickle of worry when I saw that Chokey had backed his bus to the edge of the jetty and laid a plank on top of the bus, extending several feet out over the water. He stood on top of the bus wearing trousers and a straw hat, bigger, squatter, uglier than ever. Muscles like thick, black rubber cables, cutlass scar like a streak of blood across his stomach.

"He tie rope between palm trees," explained Carmen. "Stand at end of plank with hands tied behind him. Men jump off plank, plank fall. Chokey drop into water, untie hands with he teeth, rise to surface."

My ears popped. "You gave him the trick, the way I showed you last night with the pencil?"

"*Weh.* He practice on pencil. Now he using mirror to make sure."

God! Since Chokey assumed Carmen had learned the trick by cheating, he'd assume it was right. It would be dramatic as hell, and it would have done credit to a Houdini. Except that Chokey's neck would be inside the closed loop. Instead of falling, he'd hang suspended twelve feet above the water, unreachable by the people on the truck, hands tied. And he would die.

If I stopped him, Chokey would once again have the upper hand. If I let him die, there'd be investigation — fingerprints — deportation—death row.

Suddenly Chokey's life became as important to me as my own.

"Carmen, go tell him not to use the mirror." She hesitated and I said, "The trick won't work with the mirror."

She took two steps, then turned back. "I don't understand."

"I mean the way the fool has it set up now, it'll kill him." I put a hand in the small of her back and pushed. "Tell him, damn you! And hurry!"

She understood then, and began elbowing through the tight-choked crowds around the bus. They were working themselves into a fever as they waited for something to happen.

I saw Panama with a finger drum, mooching around the edge of the crowd as he drummed out an absent rhythm. Boys flirted with girls. A ragged kid asked me for small change, and I ignored him.

The blind dwarf found me, smelled me maybe, and wanted me to pull a quarter from his ear so he could buy bread. A hot sun pounded down and I sweated.

"A little something extra for the tourist, eh?" The voice came from behind me.

It was the corporal in his white pith helmet. I felt my body go through its automatic reaction to cops. My face froze, my stomach went tight, joints stiffened.

I said nothing, but he came to stand beside me.

"Sorry I missed the performance in the rumshop last night," he said. "I understand you demonstrated the trick."

"I didn't give it to him."

"Nonetheless, you introduced it. I hope for your sake that it results in no injury to a citizen."

I saw that Carmen had reached the top of the bus. She whispered in Chokey's ear, and he gave me a venomous look. Now he knew.

"Nothing will happen," I said.

I left the jetty and walked back toward the hotel. This was the end of it—a good plan, defeated not because my opponent was too clever, but because he was too damn stupid. Now I would have to start over again on Chokey. No, best to abandon the idea altogether.

"Wait!"

I turned to see Carmen running toward me, her red shoes slapping against her heels.

"Where you go?" she asked, panting up beside me.

"To pack," I said, walking on. "I'm getting out."

She looked bewildered. "But—the hotel belong to you. From your uncle."

I stopped dead and gave her a cold stare. "You went through my luggage."

She didn't seem a damn bit ashamed. "Yes. Last night—when you sleeping afterwards. Please don't be vex. I want to work for you, keep your house, cook for you, everything."

I just looked at her. I'd met women like her before. They seem to hate you, and you never know they've changed their minds until they dump themselves in your lap and say they'll stick with you forever and ever.

I didn't want Carmen, but I was tempted to use her, just for awhile. Maybe with her help, I could still ease Chokey out quietly.

"You told me you wouldn't leave Chokey," I said.

"I said, not until he in he grave. Because he split my face if I live with other man."

"Not until—" I turned, slowly. Chokey was wrapping the rope carefully around his neck. Using the mirror.

"Chokey, wait!" I shouted.

VIII

THE CROWD WAS too noisy. I ran back to where they were packed around the bus like tree-trunks.

"Chokey, it won't work that way!"

He looked down and gave me a supercilious smile. Then he made an obscene gesture and said something in patois, and the only part I understood was bull. He used the word three times.

For a weird moment I stood there smelling the sulphur and staring at Chokey with his eyes

bright and the cutlass scar like new blood.

Carmen caught me, and her eyes were bright too.

"What did you tell him?" I yelled.

"That you maybe try to stop him. And fool him—making him think trick was wrong."

A cold fear rose up and almost choked me. *Now he'd never believe me.* I had to get to him. I started looking for a hole in the crowd and she grabbed my arms.

"Let him go. He kill heself, and I be free for you."

I swung my arm into her stomach. She tripped over the Minnie Mouse shoes and fell backward on the jetty. Her yellow dress flew up from her brown-yellow thighs and her mouth dropped open.

She yelled something, but I plunged into the crowd, kicking and gouging. *Fools. Fools.* It was like going through feed sacks, immovable bodies, eyes shiny, mouths open.

I saw that the men had finished tying the rope to the trees. The coil of rope around Chokey's neck lifted his chin and gave him a proud haughty look. He lifted his bound hands like a prize-fighter and walked to the end of the plank.

I ducked my head and shouldered my way past a woman,

Complete in the Next Issue

THE MOURNING AFTER

A Complete Mystery Novel featuring Johnny Liddell

by FRANK KANE

Johnny had never really believed all *of the Hollywood legends. But he soon discovered that truth is stranger than fiction . . . when Murder whispered: "Cut" and moved in on the Oscar winners.*

knocking a pannier of breadfruit off her head. One of the fruits rolled under my foot and tripped me. I was down on my knees when I heard the sounds:

"Ah . . . *lay!*"

There was a heavy splash as the plank fell. It was followed by a gasp from the crowd, and a small *plip* as the cane stalk hit the water.

The drawn-tight rope made little creaking sounds as it swayed.

A woman laughed, a sound which began low on the scale and rose higher and higher until it became a series of short, shrill shrieks piercing my ears like splinters of broken glass. She ended in a hiccup, then started again. During the five seconds it took me to get to my feet, her laughter was the only sound on the jetty.

A man joined in. Then someone else. By the time I reached the edge of the jetty, the crowd was tearing itself apart in convulsions of laughter. A woman collapsed and lay on her back, kicking her legs and clutching her stomach.

I looked up at Chokey. He hung suspended like a clothespin, his glossy shoes eight feet above the water. He seemed to be looking back over his shoulder at the mountains, his eyes bulging wide with horrified amazement.

For a second I thought the drop had snapped his neck, then I saw the writhing muscles of his shoulders. He was straining to free the hands tied behind his back, and his efforts had already ripped the skin from his wrists.

I saw blood dripping from the ends of his fingers.

How long does it take a man to strangle? Five—ten minutes? I couldn't remember.

I looked at the ropes tied fourteen feet up on the slick-boled palm trees. There wouldn't be time, even if I could climb the tree—and I couldn't. Climbing the bus was no answer; it was six feet away from the rope on which Chokey dangled.

Chokey's lids had begun to droop down over his bulging eyes. The laughter of the crowd was dying out, as one after another realized that here was more than a joke gone haywire. Here was death, slow and agonizing.

I don't know how many gimmicks raced through my mind during the next thirty seconds. Flitted through like swallows and disappeared. It was too late for gimmicks. Only direct, sudden action would save Chokey's life, and here I stood like a frog on a log.

But no! The solution was there all the time, surrounding me. Since it was banana-loading day, half the men present carried cutlasses —two-and-a-half foot long, backward-curving blades which they used to hack off banana stems.

I snatched one from the nearest man and shouted: "Stand back!"

They didn't understand, so I made a couple of feints with the

cutlass and gained some elbow room.

"He go kill Chokey!" yelled a woman.

"Better for Chokey if he go out fast," said a man.

I concentrated on the taut rope, aiming at a spot three feet to the right of Chokey's neck. I raised the cutlass and threw with all my strength. It spun in the air, flashed in the sun. Twang! The big, curving knife hit the rope, bounced, and fell into the water.

The crowd moaned. But I'd severed one—no, two strands. The rope twisted, unraveling. Then . . . *thunk!* The last strand broke.

Chokey hit the water limp, like a bag of old clothes.

Bubbles blossomed where he went down.

"Now he go drown," observed the woman.

A wave of panic swept over me, but I struggled against it, knowing I couldn't afford to give up now. There was still a chance.

Start saving a man's life and there's no end to it. And everybody seemed to be waiting for me. It was as though Chokey and I were actors in a play, and they were spectators, there to enjoy the performance, but not to interfere.

I kicked off my shoes and jumped in. Just as I hit the water, I remembered the passpost I'd stuck in my pocket that morning in case someone searched my room. Too late to do anything about that now.

I followed Chokey's bubbles and found him at ten feet, drifting down into a deep purple chasm. In the water he seemed twice as big as life, three times as heavy. By the time I got him to the surface, my lungs were bursting and I could barely stay afloat.

I found the rope which had been around Chokey's neck. I grabbed it and yelled: "Pull us in. Pull! Don't just stand there!"

Someone woke up and started pulling. All I had to do was keep Chokey afloat. I staggered onto the black sand beach, and sat down, gasping for breath. I pulled out my passport and found it a pulpy mess, almost illegible.

Someone had dragged Chokey out of the water and stretched him out on the beach. Water dribbled from his lips. A minute later he began coughing. He pushed himself to a sitting position, clutching his throat. He saw me, and opened his mouth to speak. But he could only croak.

I looked up and saw Carmen.

"Take him home," I ordered hoarsely.

She gave me a sullen look, and shook her head.

"Help him, damn you! You're his woman."

Distastefully, as though she were handling a dead animal, she helped Chokey to his feet and led him toward his bus.

Chokey was still croaking, but the croaks sounded weak and querulous, like an old man's complaints. He walked like an old man too, sliding his feet in the sand and looking down.

I had a feeling he was through, not only as a joker, but as a man. Carmen would find some way to take him out, now that she no longer feared him. Ground glass in his food, spoiled parrotfish, machineel fruit cocktail . . . She'd had a good teacher.

"Ah, Mr. Smith," said a familiar Oxford accent, "that was a near thing. A very near thing."

I felt myself stiffening, then remembered my ruined passport. It wouldn't betray me now.

"McClain," I told the corporal. "The name's Morgan McClain. Come up to my hotel and have a free drink."

I waved an arm to include the crowd. "Everybody! Free drinks at the hotel!"

Godrig trotted ahead of me up the black sand street. Behind me walked Panama, thrumming his finger drum. Behind him walked the people of Bennerie.

THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

The murder took place so high up . . . it took a crime expert to bring the killer down to earth

first degree MURDER

by ARTHUR PORGES

AS CHIEF PATHOLOGIST at Osler Hospital, I'd been privileged to help the police, in the energetic person of Lieutenant Benn, on a good many occasions. If they had a difficult case calling for laboratory analysis I was the man

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they turned to—Dr. Alfred Lewis. Partly this was due to the superb modern equipment I had at my disposal. But my own qualifications certainly entered into it. The incompetence of the Coroner, old Dr. Kurzin, also played a part.

It had never occurred to me, however, that the situation might be reversed, and that I would have to invoke the aid of the lieutenant instead of vice versa. But that's just what happened recently, thanks to my having relatives.

Like practically everybody else I am possessed of sisters, cousins, and aunts, if not by the dozens, a la Gilbert and Sullivan, still in sizeable batches. We meet socially now and then, my wife being reasonably gregarious, and not the sort to go visiting without me.

I was busy in the lab that afternoon, establishing, to the future dismay of a brash young surgeon that he had removed a damaged kidney without making sure his patient had two to begin with. This poor devil had been short-changed by nature, something his doctor had overlooked. That mournful circumstance accounted for his presence on my dissecting table, and as I gazed down at that fatal vacancy in the deceased's anatomy, I heard a sort of gulping sigh behind me, and turned to see Lisa Susan Loret, one of my many nieces, and something of a favorite.

Lisa's usually the still, deep kind, born with a high degree of self-possession, and very restful to be with. But she was now obviously in a state of agitation. I realized immediately that part of her trouble was the late patient before me, and did my best to hide the remains.

For a moment I felt like somebody in an old silent comedy, the kind where Buster Keaton or sad-eyed Harry Langdon is caught with something highly embarrassing, and doesn't know what to do with it. There was one awful instant when I seemed about to put the specimen's pancreas in my pocket. Instead I hastily flung a sheet over the whole area, and tried to act like a reputable pathologist rather than a mad butcher caught in the act.

"Lisa," I said, simultaneously rehearsing the nasty lecture planned for the nurse who'd let the girl breeze into my lab so casually, "what in the world are you doing here?"

"I had to see you, Uncle Al. We need your help."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Ricky Talbott and I."

"Do I know him?"

"Yes—no, I guess not. We only met about four weeks ago, and you haven't been to dinner for months—"

"Ouch!" I said. "Don't rub it in. Your mother has practically expelled me from the clan as it is. All right, Lisa, honey. Ricky, I

presume, is the latest captive of your big blue eyes and ponytail. Now what about him?"

She colored a little. That's the kind of nieces I have. Instead of playing Lolita to some aging film star, they actually blush. The family is out of joint with our times.

"He's an awfully nice boy; a student. Very brilliant, too. In fact, he's graduating in a week—with a psychology degree."

"Not even modern medicine can cure that."

"It's no joke," she said drearily. So I led her to an armchair, the good one, not the special for bores, which slants forward and has a slick seat. I patted her shoulder for good measure.

"Sorry, honey; I didn't mean to be unsympathetic. It's just that we old fogies often wish our troubles were strictly teenage again. Suppose you tell me what's bothering you."

"They've arrested Ricky for murder! It's all a terrible mistake, but they won't listen to me."

I gave a short whistle, and sat down myself. Lord knows I'd worked on enough killings, some by legal criminals—or rather illegal—and others by so-called surgeons; but it was a shock to find one so close to home. And especially after my crack about teenage problems.

"Just whom is your boyfriend supposed to have murdered?"

"Professor Slater. It's so fantastic," she flared, electric blue eyes snapping. "Why, Ricky literally *worshipped* that man. He took most of his psych courses with him, and the professor was sponsoring his degree. Besides, Ricky couldn't kill anybody; he's so easygoing. I was always scolding him for not taking his career more seriously. People who treat life like a big joke are never murderers, are they?" she demanded. "Why, he won't even study half the time, and Commencement's almost here."

"You'd better tell me exactly what happened, and how come they suspect this Talbott boy."

I didn't tell her about Sam Skolnik, who laughed all the time, had an enormous fund of clever anecdotes, and eventually cut off his wife's head because she accused him of repeating himself too often.

"Just because they can't find the real killer, that's why! Ricky was there, so they picked him. You know what the police are like. It's not fair."

"You'd better give me the whole story, from the beginning."

"Well, Ricky likes to climb—mountains, you know. It's one of his hobbies. He's about the only one around here," she said with pride, "who can get to the top of the Devil's Pitchfork."

"What on earth is that?"

"It's a group of three peaks near the Nevada border. They're al-

most straight up—some kind of needles, the climbers call them, only it's a French word I can't say. Like eye-goo. Ever so many feet high. You get up by edging along the tiniest little crevices and things.

"Well, Ricky and the professor went out there Saturday morning. Ricky was going to climb it for the fourth time, and try to beat his best speed—three hours and forty minutes. The professor intended to gather some cactus plants for his rock garden. Everything seemed so normal. Ricky got to the top five minutes earlier than before; and then when he looked down to signal Mr. Slater, he saw that the poor old man was lying there on the ground—dead! And now the police—that awful Lieutenant Benn is so stern—they say Ricky did it."

"How was he killed?"

"With a gun—Ricky's twenty-two calibre pistol. But he didn't do it. He was on the peak."

"Was there anybody else around at all?"

"No, that's why they blame poor Ricky. Mr. Benn says there are no tracks, so nobody else could have done it. But he's wrong," she cried, her eyes flashing again. "Ricky was way up on top of the mountain when it happened. He left the gun in the jeep. Some maniac must have come along and shot the professor for no reason at all."

She shivered a little. "If Rick had been down there, the man might have killed him, too."

"Can he prove that part about being on the peak when Slater was shot?"

"He can't. That's just the trouble. There's never anybody around there at this time of the year. Ricky says the weather is too uncertain. It's very dangerous to climb if the rock is wet or there's too much wind. Most people, especially from out of state, come in July or August, not April. Very few can make the climb anyhow, because it takes even an expert like Ricky almost four hours each way."

"Well," I said judiciously, "you can hardly blame Benn for holding the boy. What else could he do in the circumstances? What could anybody do? The evidence seems pretty conclusive. After all, if the police say nobody came near the professor, they can prove it in court. There's nothing rash about friend Benn."

"That's why I've come to you." Her voice was soft; she was all small cat now, wide-eyed, soft, cuddly. They learn it young. "And don't be so defeatist; it's not like you, Uncle. When Ricky realized you were *the* Dr. Lewis, he got real excited. Before that he was sort of bewildered and hopeless. He's read about all those past cases of yours, where the evidence had everybody running around in circles."

I know a good butter job when I meet it. By the time she's twenty, Lisa will be able to charm a deaf bird out of a tall tree.

"Just what does he expect me to do, for God's sake?"

"Well, we talked it over. If you can prove that he was up on the Devil's Pitchfork when the professor was shot, they'll have to turn him loose, won't they?"

"I suppose so. *If* any such proof exists, and I'm clever enough to find it."

"We're counting on you. He's innocent—I'm sure of that, so there has to be something to show it, isn't that so? Will you help us, please?"

There was only one possible answer.

"All right, Lisa. I'll talk to Benn right away, and see just what kind of a case he has against Talbott. Now you'd better scoot home and leave the rest to me."

She gave me a warm look from those enormous violet eyes, kissed my cheek lightly, and left. It was pretty clear how she'd got by that dragon of a nurse. Not even another woman could resist Lisa when she turned on the charm. Not for nothing had she been called, when still a baby of four, "Lisa, the Incomparable" by a certain doting uncle—namely me.

SO THAT'S HOW I happened to be messing in one of Benn's cases for a change, instead of being dragged in to the detriment of Osler Hospital. He was more than willing to help me, but took a dim view of Talbott's chances.

"The boy's obviously guilty as hell," Benn assured me grimly. "No matter what your niece says. Believe me, Al, the two of them were out there all alone. Nobody else within miles of the place, except for a couple of prospectors who never got closer than ten miles. The professor was shot in the head, at close range, with Talbott's own gun. The powder burns are very strong. Naturally, there are no fingerprints. The boy must have remembered to wipe them off.

"The days are gone," he added sourly, "when any crook is dumb enough to forget about that. Possibly he did the killing in a fit of rage, and then built up the best alibi he could on the spur of the moment. He wiped the butt clean, and claimed to have been on top of the mountain when Slater was shot. That's easy to say, but the fact is nobody came near them, and there are no witnesses to the boy's supposed climb."

"Just what was the motive—that fit of rage you pull out of the air?"

"I don't know yet," Benn said coolly, "but give me time."

"What I'd like to settle also is this. If Talbott's story turns out to be true, and he really did go to the summit, would that clear him?"

Benn frowned, not liking the idea at all, or perhaps the *iffy* nature of it.

"Maybe it would," he said cautiously. "You see, there's no doubt that Slater was shot at noon, plus or minus at most forty-five minutes."

"Kurzin Time?" I asked drily, thinking that if the senile coroner did the estimating, I wouldn't arrest Public Enemy Number One on his evidence.

Benn shook his head. "The old buzzard is on vacation. We got a man from Bakersfield to do that chore. He's a competent medical examiner. Maybe you know him —Doctor Faier."

"You bet I do. A very cautious fellow. If he says noon, you can make book on it. Faier wrote the text I learned from."

"Now if Ricky actually climbed the Devil's Pitchfork," Benn said, "he must have started at about eight-thirty in the morning. So at twelve he'd be near the top. He couldn't possibly get down in less than three hours. There's only one face that can be managed at all, they say. It's normally a four hour job, but the kid's very good, and has done it well under that time. This isn't just hot air from his playmates; it's what the experts at the Sierra Madre Club told me."

"Then to prove the boy's innocence, I need solid evidence that he was actually up there around noon."

"Not quite—noon on the day of the murder. After all, he could have climbed to the top earlier in the week and planted stuff to fool us—cigarette butts, beer cans, footprints, what have you?"

"That's true. But suppose you never do find a motive? Why should Talbott kill the professor? Lisa—my niece—says that he was very fond of the old man, admired him tremendously."

"Maybe." Benn was dubious. "I think that kid's favorite character is Ricky Talbott. He doesn't impress me favorably at all. His family has money, lots of it, and the boy's never had to ask twice. Since his father died five years ago, his mother's been even softer. No discipline in the house. He's all synthetic charm, but snake-cold inside, I'd bet anything. If I had a pretty young niece involved with him," he added cynically, "I'd invest in a good chastity girdle!"

"Hardly the function of an uncle," I grinned. "And now, since I've pumped you dry, how about a few words with Talbott?"

"Why not?"

He took me to the boy's cell, and locked me in. "Yell when you want out," he said, and moved down the corridor beyond earshot.

Talbott was young, only twenty-two; dark, very good-looking, with teeth that had been brilliantly

capped, Hollywood style. Only in our weird society do people grind down perfectly good dentition in order to make a normally pleasant smile into a crockery spectacular. The cannibals, at least, do it for a reason.

I noticed at once that the boy moved about the small cell with feline grace and strength—qualities, no doubt, that helped make him an expert mountaineer. He had charm all right, lots of it, and was desperately respectful to me, tagging a "sir" on to every phrase.

Yet in spite of his highly personable front, I didn't warm up to him. I had the feeling that he was a poseur and that behind the facade of courtesy something mocking lay concealed. But then the spoiled playboy type has always repelled me, so that my judgement was apt to be a bit warped. Even if Talbott was a pampered phony, that didn't make him a cold-blooded killer.

After he had made a few tactful references to my recent cases with Benn—quite skilfully, too; no obvious flattery—we got down to business. I made him go over every moment of the trip in detail.

It turned out that his invitation to the professor had been something of an afterthought.

"I suddenly remembered that there were all sorts of cactus plants growing near the base of the Devil's Pitchfork," Ricky said. "It was strange that after climbing the thing three times, I never before thought of them in connection with Mr. Slater. Guess I was too self-centered. A fault of mine," he added with an air of candor. It was so well done, that I applauded mentally.

"Anyhow," he went on, "I phoned him Friday night, and said I was going out there the next morning. I told him about all the cactus plants, and suggested that he come along. He could search for good specimens while I made the climb. He was quite tickled at the idea, so I picked him up in the jeep just before seven in the morning. We got there about eight.

"Oh yes; I gave Jerry Kanarik a lift to Peters' Canyon, too. Well, the professor and I got to the peaks about eight, and I was climbing in fifteen minutes. He was puttering around the area." Ricky's face darkened. "The old man was so happy. Now I wish I'd never brought him at all. To think that some crazy swine shot him while I was up there unable to help. He must have got my twenty-two from the car. But why —*why?* Nothing was stolen, the cops say. Just some trigger-happy punk—a real psycho."

"You hear the shot?"

"I'm not sure. A twenty-two doesn't make much noise. I thought I heard it, but at the time didn't pay any attention. Maybe in the back of my mind I guessed that

Slater was after a rattlesnake. Lots of them around."

"Why didn't your psychopath leave tracks—that's what hurts our case."

"I wish I knew. But that's why I thought of you. Some of your cases have almost been John Dickson Carr types—sort of locked room mysteries. Maybe this will work out that way."

He had a point there. I'd cleared up a couple of killings a few months ago that involved trackless murders on a muddy surface.

"What did you do on top of the mountain?"

"It's nothing that grand—just an aiguille. French for 'needle.' Right away I looked down to signal the professor that I'd made it all right, and in record time—three hours, thirty-two minutes. He was sprawled out on the sand. I figured he was only napping. You see, he was pushing seventy, and a jeep is no bed of roses on rough ground. Then I thought it would be nice, and sort of fun, to take a picture of him from up there, so I did—several, in fact."

I stiffened at that.

"Pictures? What kind?"

"Ordinary Ektachrome—thirty-five millimeter. I have a Robot Camera."

I know the kind. It has a powerful spring, so that after winding the thing up you can shoot one frame after another, machine gun style, without having to cock the shutter and advance the film for each shot.

I gave the boy a sharp glance. For a smart character, he didn't seem to realize the implications of his remarks.

"Where's the film?"

"At home. Why?"

"We'd better have them developed at once."

He looked bewildered.

"They're already printed. I only took three. Then I got worried, the way Mr. Slater was lying in such a funny position. So I hurried back down."

"You mean the film is printed? I don't get it. You were arrested only two days after the killing—on Monday evening, right?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't send pictures out; I do my own. Ektachrome's easy, not like Kodachrome—that has to go to a professional lab. But why all this interest in the film?"

I shook my head wonderingly.

"Do you mean that although Slater—the man you admired so much—had just been murdered, you still bothered to fool with photography?"

"Of course not," he snapped, obviously resentful. "I was hoping there might be a clue, something to help clear up the case. Tracks, a clue—who knows what might show up on a photo. Sure, I know the cops take pictures. But mine was from a different angle, and right after the murder."

The boy made good sense.

"Well. Did the pictures show anything?"

"No, sir. Nothing of any use. Just the professor lying there, dead."

"Don't you see," I pointed out with some impatience, "if you have a shot from the top of the cliff, and showing Slater's body, then you're in the clear. Such a view could only be had from that one place; there's no other high ground in the area, I understand. And since it takes well over three hours to get down—"

"Of course!" he interrupted eagerly. "You're a marvel, Doctor. That proves I couldn't have killed him. Look," he added, squirming with excitement and suddenly boyish, "those prints are in the right hand desk drawer in my study. Tell Mom I said you could have them. You'll clear me with the cops?" he demanded.

"Not so fast. If the pictures prove what we think they do, it'll be a good start, but nothing more at the moment. Still, it does brighten the prospect a lot."

He seized my hand and pumped it vigorously.

"I'm awfully damned grateful, sir. I really am."

I rescued my aching fingers and yelled for the lieutenant. Benn strode up and let me out. He noticed Talbott's elation with a kind of sour wonder.

"Another rabbit from the hat—

or stethoscope—Oh genie of the lab?"

"Not a whole one; maybe a lucky hind foot."

When we reached the outer office, I told him about the pictures. For a moment Benn appeared a bit shaken by the news; then his jaw thrust out, Dick Tracy style, and he said crisply: "It won't do, Al. Not the way it stands. We still don't know that's it's impossible to get up or down that needle in less than three and a half hours."

"But you said the experts—"

"What do you know about rock-climbing?" he broke in.

"Damn little," I admitted cheerfully.

"Then listen for a minute. I've had my ears bent by pros until I could almost write a guidebook. Sure, it takes three plus hours if it's done by the code. But a murderer isn't playing games. Ever hear of a piton?"

"Pee-tawng? Sounds like French for a python," I said.

"Good try, but it's actually a steel peg, sharp at one end, and with a snap ring at the other. You hammer a flock of them into the rock as you go, run a rope through each, as needed, and scoot up or down a vertical cliff in no time. Now, officially, pitons are barred on the Devil's Pitchfork; they would make it a pushover. But just suppose that Talbott had driven them before Saturday, and strung a rope. He could shoot the old man, hustle up the cliff in maybe an hour, take an alibi picture, and scramble down in minutes. Not that he'd have to hurry on the return trip. He could take his time removing the pitons. You saw how strong and limber that boy is."

"You're one thousand per cent right in terms of logic," I complimented him. "But we have to check it out. If there are no traces of such gadgets, then Talbott's alibi holds."

"Maybe," he said doubtfully. "There was certainly no rope anywhere near the scene of the crime. That means it was hidden—buried, possibly—or brought back and disposed of later."

He reflected for a moment, then scowled. "Wait, though. You can't hide a big coil of rope in a jeep; it's too bulky. They gave the Kanarik boy a lift that morning. I'll ask him if he saw anything like that in the car. If not, then Talbott must have hid it near the peak before driving out there Saturday morning. Hell, it could have been put near the cliff several days before."

He stood there, reviewing the situation for a moment. Then he said: "I certainly can't climb that damned mountain to investigate; three flights of stairs are my limit these days. But I'll put in for the county helicopter and some good binoculars. We'll examine every foot of the cliff's face. If there are pitons in the rock, or the holes they left, we should be able to spot them easily."

"Very ingenious," I complimented him.

"Too late today, though. We'll go out tomorrow morning—okay?"

"Fine. I've never been up in a helicopter; it should be fun."

"Think so?" he inquired bitterly. "In this damn job, there ain't no such animal."

But it was enjoyable in spite of Benn's attitude. More exciting than a jet, I thought. You could see more, and the feeling came close to the free flight of a dream. As for our particular job, it was perfect. The skilled pilot took us up the face of the cliff almost an inch at a time, just a few yards away, in spite of gusty winds that could have bothered anybody but an expert.

We scrutinized the colored rocks with minute care, the powerful binoculars bringing them almost to

the ends of our noses. There were no pitons, nor any holes where they had been driven. Benn was visibly downcast at the destruction of his theory, but then another idea came to him, and he perked up.

"Hell," he said, as we climbed out of the helicopter; "Talbott didn't really need any pitons. He could go up the usual way, in no hurry, tie his rope to a rock or tree on top, and slide down. He could easily fasten it in such a way, by doubling, maybe, so as to pull it free from below."

"That won't do," I objected promptly. "It's the ascent that has to be quick. If those photos can be proved to date from around noon on Saturday, then he's home free. Consider the time-table. Slater was killed about twelve. In order to get a picture of the body within Dr. Faier's estimate of noon plus or minus forty-five minutes, the boy would have had to climb that peak in less than an hour. Is that possible?"

"No," he admitted glumly. "Not without pitons or a rope already in place. Even then, it would be quite an athletic feat."

"Suppose he had put a rope in place earlier in the week?"

"Very risky. Anybody might spot it and ruin his alibi. He certainly didn't bring a big coil of rope along on Saturday. The Kanarik boy says there was nothing that size in the jeep. Just a lunch basket, camera equipment, and some stuff for painting."

"Painting?"

"Talbott fools around with oils, too. One damned hobby after another, they tell me. He intended to do the Devil's Pitchfork when he came down about four. He had an easel and a big slab of hardboard along. Jerry Kanarik mentioned such a large, flattish package. Naturally the artistic bit went by the boards when the professor was killed."

Benn pawed his sandy hair. "Damn it, Al—if Talbott didn't do it, who the hell's guilty? There was a heavy rain Thursday, and not a soul but those two has been here since, as any fool can plainly see. The two prospectors were miles away. It simply has to be the kid."

"Maybe that's still the case," I told him. "Remember, nobody's seen those pictures yet. They may not even exist. Also, we have to make sure that rope wasn't in position earlier."

He led the way back to the helicopter. "We'll get that film right now; my car's waiting at the airport."

MRS. TALBOTT was a stately, grande dame type of woman in appearance, but gave the impression of being slightly featherbrained. She welcomed us to Rick's study, the kind of a room Einstein deserved and probably

never had until he was sixty.

While Benn studied the photos with a lengthening face, she insisted on showing me the carbon of her boy's final term paper, the one on which his Bachelor's Degree depended. It consisted of some eighty pages of research with the title: *Emotional Patterns of the Only Child.*

"It's almost a miracle, the way Ricky pulled out of it this time," she said. "Such a funny boy. He goes for days without touching a book, and then buckles down to turn out fine work like this. What couldn't the dear boy do by applying himself regularly."

The report was superbly typed, with that perfect evenness that only a good electric machine can produce. I glanced around for it, having wanted one myself for ages, but saw only a brand new Olympia.

Benn came over with the prints. There were only three. All of them showed essentially the same scene: the professor's sprawled body, the jeep, and some odds and ends of equipment. There was also a big cactus which cast a short, black shadow. To the casual eye, at least, they were obviously taken from high on the cliff.

"See the shadows?" Benn asked darkly. "Especially the big cactus. Very short. The kind you get at noon. It seems to check out. But," he added hastily, "I'm not admitting anything officially until some good astronomer has a look."

I was eyeing the typewriter hungrily. A real beauty.

"Is this where Ricky did all his schoolwork?" I asked Mrs. Talbott.

She beamed. "That's right. Isn't it a lovely room? And we bought him that imported typewriter just last year."

I played with it for a moment. I've typed a few reports myself. You can't turn out many long ones without beating up even the best machine. The action of this one was smooth, easy; there were no signs of wear on the platen. If this typewriter had been used on anything longer than a sonnet, I'd eat it.

Mrs. Talbott was now hauling a good sized oil-painting from the closet. I don't know much about art, but this seemed rather good for a beginner. I said so, and Mrs. Talbott seemed about to kiss me.

"It's such a shame," she sighed. "He hasn't touched his oils for weeks. The dear child's had so many hobbies—stamps, model planes, kites, bird-watching. Most of them didn't last."

Somewhere in my mind certain vague notions were combining in a suggestive way. They were still very obscure, but the shadows were moving away, leaving something surprising in view.

"He's still active in photography, I understand."

"Oh, yes. That he's stuck to. He has his own darkroom. He has

great talent there, too. If only Ricky would just decide on his career, and settle down—" She broke off with a helpless shrug.

Benn readily got her permission to carry off the pictures; but had to promise they would be available to the boy's attorney when he hit town. She mentioned his name. He's the biggest—the Jerry Giesler of these parts.

Back outside, the lieutenant said: "We're only a jump from Bateman Tech. Let's hunt up Jack Stutesman, the astronomer there. He'll check these photos for us. He gave the department an assist on that Babikian case where the defense claimed there was enough starlight to identify a make of car in the dark."

Luckily Stutesman was on campus. Quite often he was away at Rocketdyne on consultations. He took the prints in his lean fingers and studied them, first with the naked eye, then with a good dissecting microscope. Finally, using a nautical almanac, he made some calculations based on the lengths of certain well-defined shadows: the cactus; the jeep; and the professor's small spade stuck in the sand.

"Assuming these pictures were taken this year," he said with complete assurance, "the film was exposed at twelve eighteen, approximately, on Saturday. Is that what you wanted to know?"

"And if they weren't snapped then," I needled Benn, "Slater was an awfully well preserved corpse."

"Thank you," he told Stutesman, ignoring me. "It may not be what I wanted to know, but it's what I must know." He took a peek through the microscope himself. "They're sure sharp enough. I can even see the bullet hole, and a small patch of blood on the sand." He thanked the astronomer again, and we left.

Outside he said unhappily: "When Talbott's lawyer gets this news, the D. A. will have a litter of black kittens. It shoots his case to pieces."

On hearing this, I began to change sides emotionally. After all, Benn was an old friend, and an honest cop. The annoying inconsistencies in the back of my mind were pressing forward, demanding an explanation.

"Don't give up too soon," I told him. "I may have your motive."

He stopped halfway into the cruiser. I pushed him so that he almost fell behind the wheel, and slipped alongside. But he wouldn't move the car an inch until I explained.

"I could be way off," I said. "But here's how it looks. We've got a punk kid who's been loafing his way through college using his phony charm on a senile old man. Talbott would goof off for weeks, according to his mother, and then when some important paper was

due, would come up with a beauty —a professional job of research typed on an electric machine which he doesn't happen to own."

Benn's eyes narrowed, and his big hands tightened on the wheel.

"Get the picture?" I continued. "A boy with dough can buy anything from a book report to a doctor's thesis on vector spaces. And I'll bet that's exactly what Ricky did—bought that eighty page hunk of research from some hungry graduate student or professor of psychology."

"Then what was his motive for killing Slater?"

"This is only a guess, but I'm willing to bet on it. The old boy must have gotten wise at last on how Talbott had been using him. He wasn't about to hold still for a fake term paper with a degree at stake. So the boy lured him out there, maybe under some pretense of explaining away the inexplicable, and cold-bloodedly shot the professor.

"That way, in all the fuss, somebody else would have to pass on the thesis in a hurry, and not knowing the boy's character, but only that Slater vouched for his work, he'd riffle through the thing in ten minutes, and say to the dean, 'One degree coming up.' "

"But to kill for a thing like that! "

"I didn't think you shocked any more. The boy probably doesn't care a hoot for the degree as such, but if he's as vain as most criminal types, he would dread exposure as a cheat instead of a brilliant, erratic scholar who could catch up on his hard-working classmates any time he pleased."

"But those pictures!" Benn objected. "You just proved—you and Stutesman—that Talbott couldn't possibly have done the killing."

"I know it looks that way, but I'm not convinced. There's some trickery involved."

"You mean with the camera?

A lens that gives the impression of height even from the ground?"

"I never heard of anything that could do such a miracle. I'm still thinking of a rope placed earlier."

"We'll check both ideas," Lieutenant Benn said curtly.

"Lunch first," I replied. "Any more of this rat-race without refuelling, and I'll be ready to murder old men the way Mark Twain did tramps—by the cord. I'll begin with that niece of mine, though."

"All right; you eat. I'm not hungry. I know an expert photographer. I'll just run over to his studio and see him. Suppose I drop you at Barone's and join you in about forty minutes?"

He practically threw me out of the cruiser at the restaurant, and drove off.

But when he did return, he was no ray of sunshine. "My expert says no," he groaned, staring blankly at Barone's delectable food. "There are lenses that make near things look far, but they won't fool anybody. The perspective is off compared to a simple shot from a high place. Those three pictures were taken from up there, all right. It's no use fighting that part any more. I've put my men to checking Talbott's movements earlier in the week. If he went out to the Devil's Pitchfork before Saturday, we'll have him cold."

"There may be some other way

to fake such a photo," I said. "I'll grab a cab back to Osler so I can chew it over for a while."

WELL, I WORKED my intellectual cud like a discontented cow. But it wasn't until late the following afternoon that I got on the right track. Benn phoned about two to say that Talbott had definitely been in town for a couple weeks prior to Saturday—in fact, his jeep had been immobilized with a broken axle. As a clincher, some uranium hunters had been near the needle just before the rain, and were sure that no rope was in place.

When the lieutenant's investiga-

tion made it plain that all other roads were barred, I knew we were up against some photographic trick, or else the boy was really innocent. And with no tracks or motive, that last was hard to buy. A wandering psychopath is possible; one that doesn't leave tracks on damp sand, no.

So I began to think of ways of raising a camera to the height of a cliff. First came the most obvious —a balloon. But a camera, even a 35 millimeter type, weighs a pound or more. You'd need a fairly big gasbag, and there wasn't any in the jeep, not inflated, anyhow. And bottled hydrogen or helium isn't something you pick up at the corner drugstore.

Then all at once it hit me. I remembered seeing an ingenious way of surf-fishing in an old HOME MECANICS MAGAZINE. That big, flat package—suppose it contained not an easel and hardboard, but a kite? That would explain everything. Mrs. Talbott spoke of kites as among the boy's hobbies. You can rig a small camera on a kite, especially a Robot, and take all the pictures you like. In the magazine, the author told how to manipulate a kite over the water, and have it carry a lure beyond the surf. This was no different basically.

I thought the details through, and phoned Benn. He hurried over to the hospital, very excited. At first he was a little skeptical. I couldn't blame him. Nevertheless it did fit all the facts. The killer was one of those bright—some would say, too bright—boys with plenty of imagination to make up for lack of character. Besides, anybody who dabbles in photography as a hobby is bound to get involved with trick pictures. I did it myself, years ago—putting my girlfriends' faces on the bodies of movie stars, usually in swim suits. It made me very popular indeed.

But Benn was no camera bug, and had to be convinced.

"What about the shutter and viewfinder?" he wanted to know. "How can they be controlled from the ground?"

"Easily. With a Robot you only have to keep pulling the release. All the rest is automatic until the spring runs down. As for the viewfinder, that's a problem. But don't forget you can load thirty-six or more frames in the camera—most photographers don't use the commercial cartridges, so there's almost no limit. The kid probably took several dozen pictures at least, and got rid of the ones that were off-angle as the kite shifted. Burned 'em, most likely, to make sure they'd never be found."

"Sounds pretty reasonable, at that, the way you tell it," Benn said. "Talbott could have shot Slater, wiped the gun clean, got that kite up right away, and taken a whole mess of pictures. Suppose none of them had been

any use—wrong angle for a cliff shot? He'd be dead."

"It was a pretty safe gamble, with thirty-six or more to play with. He could manipulate the kite with one hand, and watch the camera. When he saw that the line-up was about right, he could tug the string attached to the shutter release. Some of them were certain to be good.

"There's one more thing," Benn said, typically cautious. "Could he be sure of getting that kite up fast—or at all?"

"It's a certainy in April. Plenty of wind out there now; you felt it in the helicopter. I wouldn't care to try it in August, though. Do you know," I added sheepishly, "that wunderkind led me right down the garden path. He made me—*me* pick out the alibi he'd prepared so carefully. As if it was my idea about the pictures that was going to clear him."

"Can we actually prove they were faked from a kite? In court?"

"I don't see why not. Get some shots from the cliff with the same camera. They're bound to be different in small ways. You can't make a kite hover exactly over the top of a needle like that. It'll be too high, or too low, or off to one side. Get Stutesman to look for those variations. He'll find them, all right."

The rest was routine police work. Benn quickly found the agency that supplied the ghost writers. Pictures taken from the Devil's Pitchfork, and analyzed mathematically in terms of shadow length and perspective, proved that Talbott's pictures were taken from positions well above the peak, and several feet to the right. Unless he had wings, the boy couldn't possibly have photographed anything from there in person.

So far Talbott has stuck to his story of a trackless psychopath, but Benn is betting the boy will end up pleading some kind of temporary insanity. With his lawyer, and enough money, he might get away with it.

Meanwhile, Lisa Susan won't talk to me. I hate to face her at dinner tomorrow, but my sister will clobber me if I don't show up. On the other hand, her special meatloaf is something I'd hate to miss. Guess I'll go.

A somber story of violence . . . and an ex-GI in post-war Italy by a mystery story great.

THE LONELY BEACH

by
ED
LACY

I WAS WORKING on a truck in my garage when this American tourist couple drove up in a rented Fiat. Tourists rarely visit our part of southern Italy. You find a few English in Bari, but not many Americans, and I'd never before encountered one in Barletta.

The woman was about thirty-two, with a tense, over-powdered face, and scrawny figure. The man

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was perhaps forty, big and soggy. I have kept up my English via language records, and I was glad of the chance to use it.

I came over and asked, "You need gas, some oil?"

The man's fat face broke into a grin. "You've got bigger, of course, but I'd remember you anyplace. Joe Spaghetti! Rode all over here, looking for you!"

I hadn't been called by that nickname for over seventeen years and I hadn't liked the name even in the old days. The man added, "Come on, Joey boy, you remember me. Andy Burns? Sergeant Andy Burns with the bomber group stationed in Cerignola?"

"Well, that was many years ago —I was a kid then. Now, I'm a married man, the owner of this garage," I said slowly, trying to recall his thick face. There was a meanness in it which rang a distant bell—a bad one.

Turning to the woman he said, "Our outfit kind of adopted this kid. A dirty little bag of bones, but we fed him, taught him English, let him run the bar for us."

"The war is long over," I said. "Joseph Amatino is my name, and if I was a hungry kid then, I'm muscular enough now to make you take back what you just said."

For a second his eyes narrowed with anger, then he waved a pudgy hand. "No offense, Joey boy. This is the wife, Wilma. Joey, I been looking forward to returning. I must have put in two and a half years around here, and—"

"I'll never know why we have to tour this godforsaken backwoods!" Wilma cut in, her voice shrill. "I want to see Paris."

"Stop your damned nagging," the man said. "This place brings back the only happy memories I have. I wasn't hitched to you, then—thank God. I was a big operator here. We'll get to Paris, the rest of that tourist trap hoopla, soon enough. Thing I recall best was the long stretches of clean beaches, all to yourself. I used to leave my bombs in the fields between here and Foggia, and starting with April we'd sneak over for a nude swim every day. Grab some rations, a few girls. I never forget the peace of these beaches. Joey, are they still unspoiled?"

I nodded. "Few of our people bathe in the sea. I do remember you now, Sergeant . . . Andy. Naturally you were leaner then. Seventeen years makes a difference."

"Yeah. But I've never forgotten this spot. That's what I told Wilma when we started on this vacation. We're spending the night in a Barletta hotel. Joey, I'll call for you tonight. We'll sop up some vino, bull about old times."

"Well, if you wish. I close the garage at eight." I nodded toward his wife. "It has been a pleasure to have met you, Mrs. Burns."

She sniffed her nose at me.

Working on the truck the balance of the afternoon, I thought about Sergeant Burns. Some few G.I.s had been like wild children away from home for the first time —treating us like dirt, tossing us crumbs, insulting our women, often beating up our defeated men.

True, the British also had types like that, while the Germans were beasts. I suppose one finds some nasty ones in any army, even in ours. However, the majority of the G.I.s had been most friendly. In fact, my mechanical education is the result of a motor pool sergeant's interest in me.

Burns had been one of the bad ones, going on terrible drunks. The others said it was due to the nature of his work. He and a small detail lived in tents miles from the bomber squadrons, the cities, other soldiers—purposely dispersed far from the planes. Sergeant Burns was in charge of the great bombs, spread out in the fields like so many giant death eggs. In case of an air raid, or an accident, he would have been blown to shreds.

While neither of those tragedies ever happened, it must have been a strain on him. He was a master sergeant, the expert who fused the bombs, and had them delivered to the B-24 squadrons during the night, to be hoisted into the bomb-bays before dawn missions.

It certainly was ironical. For a time I used to receive Christmas cards, a few gifts, from some of the G.I.s, but that stopped around 1949. Out of the hundreds of kind G.I.s I'd known, none had ever returned—except this one. He had once slapped me unconscious when I refused him a drink—after the C.O. had warned me about serving drunks.

Burns called for me at 8 P.M., alone. He said his wife was in bed with a headache. Naturally I did not ask him to my home, to meet my sweet Maria. We went to a small nearby cafe, and he ordered drinks for all, at once. With me translating, Burns loudly explained he was *the* returning G.I.

The men had never known him, but for free wine they acted interested. Of course we talked of the war—of the farmers around Cassino who, to this day, are now and then killed when they plow into an old land mine.

Burns said, "Guess you know the beaches around here were mined against invasion from Yugoslavia."

"Our beaches?" a fisherman asked, crossing himself. "Impossible. We walk much of those sands every day."

"I never heard they'd mined the beaches," I told Burns. "With the Partisans controlling Yugoslavia, there was no danger of invasion."

"That's how it turned out, but we didn't know if they could hold the Krauts," Burns said loudly, the others insisting I translate it word-

by-word. "Don't worry, the mines were later removed." He winked. "Maybe I shouldn't be spilling military secrets, but I know it was so, because I stored the mines in our fields."

Another old man went on to say this only proved how foolish it was to bathe in the Adriatic—he had wisely never done so in all his 76 years. Then a man told of his cousin dying up in Viareggio. They had stored supposedly safe German mines outside a Red Cross building.

For some unknown reason the mines had suddenly exploded shortly after the war in Italy had ended. I'd heard this tale many times. When the talk came around to the might of the present Italian army, it was after midnight.

I was tired from so much translating, and slightly drunk. Burns said he was anxious to return to his hotel. He planned to go swimming in the morning, and drive on to Naples in the afternoon. He bought a last round of wines, shook everybody's hand, and I saw him to his car, urging him to drive with care. He was also 'zigzagging.'

At about nine the next morning they drove up to the garage. Both were in shorts. His wife had bad legs; flat all over—no bust. Except for his belly, Burns looked better than I thought, his legs powerful. They had a large picnic basket on the rear seat.

"Want to go swimming with us, Joe?" Burns asked.

"I am a poor business man, with much work," I told him. "While I have not the fear of swimming others have, I do not care much for the lonely beaches.

"I keep telling Wilma she'll never see a beach like these again—shallow water, sandy, clean bottom. Not a soul around, but a few farm shacks in the distance."

"You aren't driving a four wheel jeep, don't get stuck in the sand," I said.

"Let's get this over with!" his wife snapped. "Who wants a deserted beach? I want to see people, styles—Capri, Venice, San Remo. Gosh, you make me sick."

"What's the matter, you afraid I'll enjoy myself for a few hours?" Burns asked. "I told you, we'll see those too. You know our tour plans. Always got to be a damn kill-joy. See you Joe, on our way back."

The beach they went to is a good six miles from my shop, so I didn't hear the actual explosion, of course. But at 10:40 A.M. a police corporal came up in a jeep, told me to come along, they needed a translater. Mrs. Burns was dead.

"You speak some English," I said.

"Not enough to understand this one. Come!"

We made the ocean front in less than five minutes of wild driv-

ing. Andy Burns was still in his fancy bathing trunks, two policemen, their rifles in their arms, and a few silent farmers, around him. I didn't see what was left of his wife until much later.

Upon seeing me, Andy rushed over. "Oh God, Joe! Joe, you tell 'em what happened I can't get through to them. They don't understand English. Joe, explain it!"

"What did happen?"

"Wilma, she was exploring the beach, I was taking a nap in the sun. She—she must have stepped on a mine. She was suddenly blown to pieces! God, why did I ever come back here? Told you last night the beaches had been mined once. I thought by now—all these years—damn unused beaches! Don't you people, ever swim or . . . ?"

The corporal glanced at me, his face worried.

"Mr. Burns, where did this happen?" I asked.

"Here! A few hundred yards down this beach. See it—that black patch down there. I ran back here and lucked up on one of these old men, an old farmer with a horse. I sent him for help. My God, my wife is dead! I'll sue the Italian government."

The police corporal took out handcuffs. Burns yelled at me, "Tell him—"

"He understands some English," I said, the words sticking in my throat.

"Then what the hell is he staring at me like I was a criminal for? What's he going to do with those cuffs? Joey, tell him the government is at fault for not removing all the mines."

"Mr. Andy, stop talking. You murdered your wife! They're arresting you for the murder. There never were mines here."

"What the hell do you know?" Burns snarled at me. "I told you the beaches were mined. Damnit, it was my job to see to that!"

"Oh, shut up," I said. "Not this beach."

"Unless maybe you bring mine with you today? Maybe hide it so wife walk on it? Maybe hit wife and place her on mine, fix to blow up? Soon, we police find out. You

have this idea in head all the time, no?" the police corporal asked, using all the English words he probably knew. He was still holding the handcuffs, almost as if he didn't want to dirty himself by touching Burns.

"What is this? You lousy bums trying to frame me? Think it will stop me from suing your two-bit government? By God, I'll have the American Embassy lower the boom on you."

"Burns, you talk so damn much!" I said, quietly. "In seventeen years one forgets many things. There never was a beach here back during the war, only a big marsh. This was filled in, made into a beach, less than four years ago, when we started the anti-malaria drive. Burns, there could not possibly be any mines here. Do you understand now?"

"Four years ago? Swamp—no—beach?" he repeated in a hoarse whisper, eyes glassy blank, his big body turning a death-white even under the lobster red of his new sunburn.

The corporal suddenly went into action. He handcuffed Burns and took him to the jeep. Ex-Sergeant Andy Burns put up no fight, merely sobbed—actually wept like the fat, childish fool he was.

COMING SOON NEW STORIES BY

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The Sharp Knife of Humility

IT HAD BEEN A breakfast spat like dozens of others. It shouldn't have meant more. Don Drummond had remarked that he'd have to find another fourth for golf now that Felicia Crowley's husband was moving to take over the San Francisco office.

Sandra Drummond had shot an arch look across the table and said, "He'll be going alone, of course."

"Why—*of course?*" her husband asked.

His very attractive wife made a cynical gesture. "What could she expect after crawling back with that phony story of how she was kidnapped and held captive?"

Don lit a cigarette, his eyes slightly narrowed and stared at his wife through the haze of smoke. "So it's you girls—her friends, so called—who've built up that story? I suppose you're also the ones who spread around that she was actually off on a loop with some mystery lover?"

Sandra laid her hands on the table, touching the tips of her shapely, well-manicured fingers. It

© 1962, by Thomas Calvert McClary

It was hard for Sandra to believe her friend had been the victim of a brutal kidnapper . . . until . . .

by

THOMAS

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was one of her poses of command. She gave a short, mocking laugh. "Come, Don, you can't believe Felicia's story yourself! Just consider. This unknown stranger forced his way into her house, took his time systematically robbing it, and then forced her at knife point to accompany him on a week's wild tour of the coast. As proof, she came home wearing a lot of cuts and abrasions she blamed on a sadistic kidnapper. But there wasn't one deep or really dangerous cut on her. Not one cut she couldn't have easily given herself."

"So?" The clang of outraged chivalry was in his voice.

Sandra lifted her eyebrows. "Really! So why was she so backward about calling help or making an attempt to escape all of that time?"

Don snapped his napkin onto the table. "So help me, Sandy, if that smug shell of yours ever cracks, some very dirty colors are going to come spilling out."

She paled and tautened. "I don't

have to take that kind of insolence, even from my husband, Don!"

"Then try displaying a little humility and common decency while you've still got a husband," he snapped with disgust, and left her sitting in frozen silence.

She listened to the door bang and then poured fresh coffee and chewed at her underlip. She was unable to dismiss the outburst as just a passing spat, or difference of opinion. Actually, she doubted if it was really so much an argument about Felicia Crowley, whom he'd never liked, as the outgrowth of a mood that had been building up in him recently. Seeking an excuse to quarrel with her, he'd simply settled on the first thing that had sufficiently irked his sense of chivalry and justice.

But explaining it didn't make it one bit easier to accept. It was the first time he'd ever really blown his top like that, and she didn't like it. Don was quite capable of concealing the way he felt until he reached a point of decision, and then deciding that divorce was the only sensible solution to all of their marital difficulties.

She didn't intend to lose a good husband for the sake of an argument over some little idiot like Felicia. Still, it was very odd that he'd chosen such an impossible situation to become enraged about. Not even the police had taken Felicia's fantastic story seriously enough to pursue the investigation.

What was it he'd called her? *Smug*. Well, she had a right to be smug about a story as bald as Felicia's.

She gave a small nod of self-righteous conviction, and dismissed any doubt she might have had as to who had come out best in the argument. Her husband certainly hadn't, and fortified by this assurance she got out her gold pen and tablet to itemize the shopping necessities and chores she had to do that day.

She would, she decided, get an early hairdo at Antoines, which was right in the shopping center. The *Smart Shoppe* next door would send in their new selection of handbags for her inspection while her hair was setting. She had books to return to the nearby library, and two sport frocks to drop off at the cleaner's, and she could pick up groceries and still have time to join the girls for a diet lunch at the Beach Club.

At four that afternoon she had to attend the meeting on delinquency at the Parents and Teachers, although she was not a parent herself. However, the fact that she was an important cog in that organization showed just how much the community thought of her. Of course, she and Don had always intended to have children, and she supposed that they would have to think about it seriously before another year went by.

Then her mind returned again

to her husband's growing irritation of the past few months, and she wondered if not having a family could be part of the explanation. It was something she had better take up diplomatically when the opportunity presented itself. Being very efficient and orderly in some matters, she wrote the word *Children* on the side of the shopping list and boxed it with a heavy border.

She sat for a moment with her pen resting against her perfect teeth, studying the pattern of golden light which was filtering through the mullioned breakfast windows. When they'd first been married, they had really intended to have children right away. Five or six, they had assured each other. But how could they have known they would be caught in the hectic undertow of success, and the highly organized social life of Suburbia.

Don should have no complaints on that score, she told herself. He'd been notably successful long before most men achieved a third of what he had accomplished and he had been the first to acknowledge the extremely important role that his wife had played in helping him to reach the top.

It was a nice, comfortable, smug thought, and Sandra nodded agreeably to herself and printed the word TOP in heavy letters on her list.

At eighteen minutes to twelve, she returned home with the day's essential chores efficiently completed, humming in the preoccupied manner of a woman well-satisfied with her hairdo. She drove into the carport to unload at the back door, thinking that it would be pleasant to have a full-time maid to attend to these matters. But a good maid today cost the equivalent of a mink, or even a sable, and they went out so much that the only time they really needed a maid was when they entertained.

She had to make three trips from the kitchen to the car, during which time she left the screen door open. She heard no sound and saw no shadow and felt no warning instinct of an alien presence. She was setting her last box on the vinyl top beside the sink when the muscular hand closed over her mouth. At the same instant, she felt the warmth of a man's breath on her neck, and the prick of a knife pressed upward against her bra.

"Just take it easy and don't try any tricks, princess," a gritty voice said from behind her. "You'll have time enough for tricks later on!"

His powerful fingers felt like sticks, and he pressed her jaws so hard that pain and tension raised her up on tiptoe. He gave a prod with his knife to point up his meaning.

"One yak out of you and your

husband won't recognize the mess he'll find!"

Sandra made a frightened, smothered sound against his calloused hand. He removed his hand to jerk her around and she managed to get a few words out.

"What are you doing here in my house? What—what do you want?"

He was a tall, angular man, knotty of muscle and big of bone. He was, she imagined, what the police would call "a hard case." There was brute cruelty in the angular face and viciousness in the set of the mouth. But it was the eyes that frightened her the most — mocking, angry eyes that seemed to waver between insane menace and wicked humor.

He stepped back and stood flipping the knife slowly in his open palm. "What do I want here?" he chuckled at her question. "Now *that* might be quite a lot!"

"Is it money? Maybe there's a hundred dollars in the house," she breathed desperately.

"And maybe some jewels and furs too?" he jeered. "But you can begin by frying me a steak. I happen to know you've got one in the icebox, because I looked."

"I won't feed you!" she cried, incensed. "If you came to rob, take what you want and get out."

His lips peeled back over heavy, yellow teeth. "Now, that wasn't polite of you, princess," he mocked. Then his eyes filled with fury and his knife hand darted.

She felt the scrape of the point, but it was only a scratch. The tug of her frock and bra as he slashed them expertly just below the V of her neckline was more noticeable.

A wave of cold fear swept over her. She couldn't breathe, couldn't bring her thoughts to a focus. For a moment she stood helpless, too terrified to do more than whimper in futile protest.

He was laughing again now, the half-mad look back in his eyes, his jaw muscles twitching.

"You beast!" she moaned. "You vicious—"

She had never suspected an open hand could strike so hard. The slap jarred every tooth in her jaw and filled her head with black and bursting sound.

She'd actually known from the first, but you could know a fact, and still not believe it, as in witnessing the burst of an atomic bomb. He got his kicks from abuse and insult—from inflicting pain and making his victims grovel. Almost certainly, he would use torture in some form, but he might not kill unless he became so sadistically aroused that his control snapped completely.

Her hand had found its way to her rent clothes and she was clutching the material with ice-cold fingers. She had never felt so naked.

"A pin," she pleaded, in unreasoning hysteria. Nothing in her

whole life had seemed as important as a pin right at that moment.

The cowed tone of her voice was a mistake. Yesterday she would not have believed herself capable of abandoning all sanity, but yesterday her bra had not been split open by a brutal maniac with a wickedly sharp switch knife, and she had never been physically challenged in her own home, and her head had not been slapped into a thousand splitting lights and sounds.

Her darting eyes caught sight of the brooch she had left on the shelf above the sink at breakfast time, and she began swayingly to encircle the kitchen to get to it, watching him fearfully, not able to guess what he'd do.

He watched her trembling hands as she snatched it, and stuck herself getting it pinned in place. He laughed suddenly, a cruel laugh, like a master of the hounds who has just subdued an unruly, troublesome dog.

"You'll learn. I'll learn you," he grunted with satisfaction, and sprawled with his legs out at the kitchen table, still watching her while he rhythmically snapped his knife open and shut. "Now get that grub," he commanded.

"This is impossible!" she thought. "Being ordered about like a prisoner in my own home."

But she managed somehow to get the steak and coffee on the stove. At least, she told herself, it would give her time to think of something that might just possibly save her.

She could bolt for the kitchen door, she told herself wildly, and that would take his attention to the opposite side of the room with the table in between. She would almost certainly get hurt, she might get badly mauled or maimed or even murdered. But anything was better than this torturing uncertainty.

She eased her body a half step nearer the wall phone.

He lounged back imperturbably in his chair, eyeing her. "Not bad for a princess," he grunted. "Almost good enough so I should let you phone the dumb police."

Sandra went cold all over. Damn him, he'd known what she was attempting to do all along! But she'd try anyway. She was driven by utter desperation.

"Won't do you no good princess," he told her. "And I'd hate to mess you up right here, when the line's already cut."

In reflex action, she grabbed the phone from the hook and listened. It was true. The line was dead. There wasn't even a humming sound.

She sank back against the wall weakly, watching him as he picked up her purse and dumped it on the table.

"Thirty-one dollars and twenty-four cents," he muttered. "Small change, princess."

She had a last desperate spurt of hope. Maybe he'd just been cruelly amusing himself. Maybe all he wanted now was money.

"I've more upstairs!" she gasped.

He nodded for her to lead the way. They went through to the living room and she looked through the big picture window and saw Jilly Chapman and her two tow-headed twins coming out to their car across the way.

"If I made a bolt for it," she thought, "I could at least get to the door. If I screamed—"

But right behind her his voice came warningly: "Watch it princess," and she felt the prick of his knife against her back.

The Chapman's climbed into their station wagon and drove off while she watched. The midday sun bathed the street in shimmering silence. Not even a dog moved on the entire block. It had never looked so utterly empty and desolate.

She had almost to pull herself upstairs by the handrail. She searched for money in purses, casual boxes, odd corners of drawers, and threw the money on the bed, feeling as if somebody else were doing it.

She threw her jewel box down and breathed stridently. "Now go. Just go! You've got what you come for!"

He gave a nasty, amused laugh and shook his head. "What I come for hasn't happened yet. But I'll just take you some place where we can make a little noise in private like."

The pupils of her eyes widened and a trembling seized her. "Kidnapping too? You wouldn't dare!"

He shook a sticklike index finger at her. "Remember your manners, princess! I'd dare, because that's what I come for." He gestured at the money and jewels with disgust. "Not this chicken feed."

"But why *me?*"

He grinned—the cruel, gloating, half-crazed grin. "You're the haughty kind. They struggle harder, but in the end, they crawl and whimper. Why, you'll come crawling to kiss my boot. You'll beg me not to leave you."

He snickered. "You'll see!"

Again she had a spurt of hope. If he was stupid enough to try to kidnap her through crowds and traffic, she'd find help. He couldn't possibly get away with that.

"Pack a bag," he said. "You won't be needing many clothes, but it will look more like you left because you just couldn't resist a big strong guy like me."

She packed without thought, just having enough presence of mind left to take an extra lipstick. If worst came to worst, she might get the chance to scrawl a message on a mirror or a door.

He moved abreast of her down the stairs, with one hand encircling

her arm above the elbow like an iron band. He guided her out the back door, into the passenger seat of her own car, and leaned over to jerk the door handle off with one savage pull. She could roll the window, but she could not unlatch the door from the inside.

He took his knife out and flipped it open. It had a long and vicious-looking blade. "You might not believe it—*yet,*" he said. "But I could prick the roots of a single hair right out of you with this."

He chuckled and closed the knife and dropped it in his upper jacket pocket where he could reach it as handily as a cigar. But he didn't need a knife with hands like that. Like an eagle's talons they were—like something possessed by some monstrous mutant out of a world of insane cruelty.

He turned the car left toward Shore Road, and old Mr. Jennings, the neighborhood gardner, looked up from trimming shrubs in front of the Roberts' house and lifted his hat courteously, smiling at her.

The window on her side was open and she thought wildly, "Why don't I scream for help? Why don't I jump up on the seat and try to throw myself out? Somebody along the street must be home!"

But were they? And would they understand in time if they were? And what would this maniac do in retaliation if her attempt was unsuccessful?

But no part of it made any sense. It just couldn't happen in a civilized, well-policed community! Hadn't she said it couldn't happen to Felicia Crowley? And what would she tell Don if she didn't find help in time, if she were kept away overnight, or a week, and came in looking haggard-eyed and bedraggled, but with no more definite sign of abduction and torture than Felicia had carried?

And what a memory to leave Don if she didn't come back at all! *Smug,* he'd called her. This madman had called her *haughty*. He'd picked that out just by looking at her from a distance!

"Oh Don—Donnie!" she cried inside herself. "What happened between us? What happened to *me?* What happened so fast to the days when we were so very close, before all this damned suburban life and success?"

The driver swung onto Shore Road. They passed two young matrons whom she knew. They waved, and she saw the quick, eager suspicion on their faces. Why was a strange man driving her car for her at a time of day when the mice played in suburbia?

Ahead of them, Berenice Ketchum swung out of her driveway, and Sandra prayed for the stoplight ahead to hold the car up. She must have sat sharply forward, her body tensing, for the man at her side

grunted contemptuously, and very purposely took counter-measures when the stoplight came on.

He slung his right arm over the seat, and she felt his hand creep up beneath her hair. His thumb and index finger squeezed. Not long, just warningly, but it silenced her instantly.

Berenice Ketchum smiled from her car, noting the stranger, but without much attention. Her mind was busy with a myriad intense thoughts of community and civic doings. She prattled away about some meeting later in the week, then nodded and put her car in motion again and shot out ahead of them—the suburban woman's self-ordained privilege when a man is driving next to her.

The man shook Sandra's neck and laughed and took away his hand. He said, "You might as well forget your tricks. They won't do you any good."

A mile beyond they turned inland, onto the cutoff that skirted the city. There was heavy traffic here, and many more stoplights. Surely now, she'd have the chance to call for help.

But the driver next to them at the first stop was a Caspar Milktoast who would have become frozen with panic by a woman's scream for help. And at the next light was a smug, button-faced couple, typical of the kind who never stick their necks out unless they see profit in it, and can do it cautiously.

And at the next two stops were teenagers, wrapped up in their girlfriends and wisecracks, who'd have thought a woman screaming was a drunk more irresponsible than they were.

By then, they were across the city, heading toward the desert, with mid-afternoon traffic thinning out to just a few cars making time to get away from the valley heat. Glare shimmered on the road ahead and the breeze that came in the window burned, and the heat sawed at her strung nerves, adding to her panic.

The man's mood had changed too. Even the nasty and vicious bursts of humor had drained out of him, and he watched the road with red-flecked, angry eyes and muttered sullenly to himself.

They were running low on gas, and he cursed and shot into a filling station. But when two spry, athletic-looking young attendants came energetically from the air-conditioned office, he changed his mind and gunned the car right out again.

The feeling of utter, unbelievable hopelessness was dragging her down as a whirlpool sucks a swimmer down into a muddy river. But she couldn't let him see it. That would be fatal. A highway patrol car shot by them as they rolled back onto the highway, and she sensed the momentary alarm rip

through the man, and knew that he was not all cold nerve.

He was stalling for time, too. He was stalling for darkness.

"You'll never get away with this," Sandra flung at him.

She didn't get the reaction she expected. He laughed outright. "No? I got away with it with your flossy little neighbor, didn't I?"

Felicia, she thought with shock. She'd thought of her, of course, but not in connection with this man. In fact, she hadn't even conceded the benefit of the doubt to Felicia until this instant. She'd simply thought that Felicia's story *could* have been true. Remotely possible but highly unlikely.

Good lord! she thought with a terrible, jarring shock—not even Felicia's best friends had believed her! They'd all thought it was just another of her silly little escapades, and that she'd repented of it the instant she'd sobered up enough to realize that it could have wrecked her marriage.

If they had believed her, if they had at least pressed the police harder to investigate, they just might have been watching more carefully for this maniac to return to the same neighborhood.

"Those cuts?" she asked with horror.

He giggled. It was the only word to describe the crazy sound. "One every hour on the hour," he gloated. "They didn't hurt much. They were like little drops of water. She went almost crazy, just watching the time, waiting."

Sandra shivered. She could feel the full horror of it now, because she could feel the guilt. Felicia wasn't a bad girl. Just weak and foolish.

She thought, "I've got to get loose and get back. I've got to talk with Felicia's husband before he leaves for 'Frisco!"

It was the first truly active feeling that she'd had, the first feeling that broke through the barrier of cold terror.

She stared out at the country ahead. Metallic glare shimmered and heat writhed across the landscape. The country slanted from a deep valley on the right to a crest melting into the brassy sky three or four miles to the left.

Something tugged at her mind. Something Don had told her once about the way the Apache hid along the trails in the days when the early settlers were traveling west in covered wagons. They had just been married and had been as happy and carefree as larks, even though financial success was several years in the future. They had hardly given a thought to money.

They'd spent his vacation out here on this very desert. They had lounged around their little chipfire at night with the smells of the desert drifting around them, and he had talked about the lore of the country Don loved so romantically—about the Indians and out-

laws and the small creatures of the wilderness.

That was the time he'd showed her how the glare and heat of afternoon leached all color, all shadow, all perspective from the landscape —so that an Indian could lay in a gulley or coiled like a snake around a bush, and until the evening light gained its clearing slant, you could look straight at the spot, and never notice him.

That was because the glare made everything look two-dimensional. It even distorted crests and hollows, made them look flat. But even though he'd explained all that so carefully, the very next day, driving across the open desert, she'd stepped too hard on the accelerator and dropped into an unseen gulley and cracked their axle.

It had been just about this time of day, too. It would be a half hour yet before the light slanted, bringing shadow and perspective back into the landscape.

She tried hard to think of a way to make him stop somewhere. Not desperately, but hard—there was a difference. She doubted that any plea she made in behalf of her own comfort would affect him. But he had his animal nature, and he was a big man, and he'd changed his mind about the luncheon steak she had started to cook for him and left without eating it.

She returned to the story of Felicia. She said goadingly, "You were lucky you had a mouse in tow or you wouldn't have dared stop for a hamburger."

He snorted with contempt. "Princess, you're whistling going by a graveyard! I'd stop anywhere even with you, and you'd never open your trap. I'd see to it. I've got you frozen like a snake freezes a rabbit right this minute!"

Boastful, gloating, feeling his power.

"We stopped for hamburgers, and even meals," he said.

He looked along the dancing ribbon of highway ahead. "And that reminds me of a tamale joint ahead. Maybe you never had a real Mexican tamale. It will put some pepper in you for later."

He gunned the car with hungry anticipation and wheeled off the road onto a setback. There was a dilapidated Chevvy beyond a typical 'dobe cantina. There was some colored pottery for sale, a small, fig-shaded arbor furnished with rickety benches and a weathered hammock, and a wind-scoured outhouse out in back.

A leathery faced old Mexican got up regretfully from the hammock and came to greet them. There was no sign of anyone else about.

The man looked at the outhouse and grunted, "You can take a stretch while I'm getting the tomales."

Sandra got out of the car jerkily, muscles cramped from tension and the long drive. She thought of

Felicia, and her husband, and her own smug cynicism that had added to the breakup, forcing determination through the barrier of her fear.

"Now," she thought. "Every second counts."

She started moving toward the outhouse at the rear. She passed it and her steps faltered.

What if he looked now and saw her? If he did he'd come after her and catch her before she could hope to get away. God knew what he'd do to her, but it would not be pleasant. What mercy, or help, could she expect from the old Mexican?

She heard the lift of his voice from the front of the cantina, and her steps froze. She looked back in terror, swaying a little, like a person gone strengthless, and frozen, hanging on a rope. Then she started to run.

She dropped over the rim of the little shelf and started down the rock-strewn slope. All of the ground at her feet looked the same, glaring, shimmering with dust and brown heat, flat as a frying pan. But her footing gave on the scattered shale, and she stumbled and almost fell.

She felt the strain in her knees and thighs, felt as if she'd been running for an hour before she had covered twenty yards.

She had to get down, way down, onto that slope. She had to get so far from the cantina he wouldn't even try to hunt her down on foot. He was a crazed animal and he'd be angered and want her back in his power fast.

Also, her break represented danger to him. If she got a far enough lead, she might be able to circle back and flag down a highway patrol or secure other help along the road. If she could just get far enough away, he'd have to come after her with the car.

"Oh God!" she prayed. "Don't let the light change, please!"

A cry of savage rage drifted down to her from above. She looked back in terror and saw him standing on the shelf, with his arms half-doubled. He was clutching a tomale in each fist. The hot wind blew his light jacket out like a monstrous chest, and the light was red and hot and fierce upon the insane anger of his face.

He hurled the tamales to the ground and started down the slope after her. Then, abruptly, he halted and swept the slope with his eyes, as if judging the distance he would have to cover to overtake her on foot. He must have thought it too great, for he wheeled back to get his car.

There was a boulder nest a hundred yards ahead. She knew it would do her no good to hide there, but she flung herself toward it, driven by unreasoning terror and an instinctive feeling that any kind of shelter was better than none at all.

She heard the starter grind and roar back upon the shelf, and her panic increased. In her wild haste she tripped and went sprawling.

Almost instantly she regained her feet but when she started wildly toward the rocks again she found the earth under her was upgrade, and very steep.

Then the knowledge came to Sandra that she had fallen into a slanting gulley, shallow, but still a trench. The boulders loomed beyond it, the rim of the trough cutting them in half from where she stood. If she could keep low enough she might be hidden from above, and forty yards down the slope the gulley was choked with a mass of sage.

She scrabbled in that direction, sobbing and feeling the raw tear of her heaving lungs. The car had come over the rim now. The sound of the engine was clear, direct, and she could hear its bounce, and the grit of the tires on shale. The tires were spitting pebbles.

"O God, just let me reach a place to hide!" she thought, and then she heard his wild cry of triumph as he spotted her, and knew it was too late. In seconds, he'd be on top of her. He might even smash her with the car.

Then she heard a tremendous crash. She looked back, stunned and saw the car. It was trapped in the gulley, the wheels still spinning, the hood and the rear jammed like an accordion, the whole enveloped in a swirling cloud of dust. He'd been headed for the boulders, and done what she'd done herself—driven into the wash without distinguishing it from the slope.

The dust smoke thinned and settled. Her eyes closed for a long moment, and then opened again, and the scene was real. The steering wheel had smashed, and the steering post was sheared off jagged. It had stabbed him in the chest and held him there, twitching, with his face a grotesque mask of brute pain and fury.

Utter, unimaginable relief swept over her. She sank down in her tracks, completely spent, too far gone even for hysteria.

THE COOL OF A wet towel on her brow and the smell of tamales brought her back to consciousness. Her vision focused slowly on the leathery-faced old Mexican, and a concerned-looking Highway Patrol sergeant.

The sergeant said in the voice such as he might have used to quiet a frightened pony, "Take it easy, m'am. You're safe and sound."

"That wild ladino!" the Mexican burst out. "He was mad, senora. Sick in the head! I see it when I run out to find why he is driving like crazy down toward the arroyo."

"My husband, Don," she murmured hoarsely. And then, "Water. Could I have some water?"

The sergeant laughed grimly.

"You've got what it takes, lady! The story's pretty clear—he was trying to run you down."

The highway sergeant took her home. He told her husband, "The man's an escaped con. He'll serve life this time, if he lives to stand trial. The papers will probably treat the story decently, but you can't shut up the dirty minds, Mr. Drummond. She fed the man, she packed her own clothes and left with him in her own car. They made traffic stops along the way. They passed patrols she could have yelled to."

Don Drummond looked at his wife. "If we don't bring charges and keep quiet about it, that would end it, Sandy."

She took his hand and squeezed it hard against her scraped, bruised jaw. Her falls had battered her, but in a few days, nobody would know. A secret like this was safe with the police. They didn't like the publicity of rapists and sadists running loose themselves.

But once told, it was bound to leak out. She said with uncertain humility, "I ought to tell Felicia and her husband."

The sergeant's mouth compressed. He shook his head. "If you're going to talk, I'll have to turn in a full report. That means publicity."

Drummond grinned and pulled his wife to him. "I guess we'll have to take it, sergeant. You did your best."

The sergeant smiled with grudging respect. "Well, maybe this is better," he said. "Maybe a lot of women, and husbands, we don't know about will feel better."

They looked oddly happy for people of their age and class and what had just happened, the sergeant considered. Almost like young married kids. Anyway you looked it, the news stories would be colored with their share of dirt. But the Drummonds didn't look very bothered about it.

They'd found something.

FOR FASTER SERVICE—USE POSTAL ZONE NUMBERS! INCLUDE YOUR NUMBER IN YOUR RETURN ADDRESS AND MAIL EARLY IN THE DAY—IT'S THE FASTER WAY.

Johnny, the Edge doesn't walk a detective fiction tightrope. He's neither a private-eye or an out-and-out crook. He's just Johnny, with an ingenuity that's a little on the special side, and . . . always a delight.

Without the Shadow of a Doubt

There's an old racetrack saying: "There is no such thing as a cinch as long as a horse has to run around a track." But Johnny's horse would've been a breeze if it was only a case of jumping.

by LEW LIPTON

WHEN YOU HUSTLE in all forms of gambling and travel down larceny lane as often as I have, the 'in-the-know' gang hang what they agree is an appropriate monicker on you. At birth I was christened John Webb but after I grew up, got around a bit and the wise guys got to know me, they tagged me "Johnny, the Edge." I never looked for an edge but if there was one available I'd take it for three reasons: One, because I'm a frugal soul: Two, because I like to live well: Three, because I'm superstitious about anything that's dead even!

Once to save face because of a sucker's loud squawk, I took it on the lam to Hollywood, California, where motion pictures spoiled a perfectly good orange grove. Being a good mixer, I managed to meet a big shot actor named Dan Dawson who was a leading man at the Regent studio. The

© 1962, by Lew Lipton

six-foot Dan and I hit it off at first bounce because he too, liked to gamble on anything. Half smart he got hep in no time to the fact that I was better than a green hand in all games of chance. He also seemed to like the scenery I wore.

I was always decked out in a swell array of expensive threads that were put together for me by the best tailor in New York City. Not alone my front but my calm, gentlemanly manner impressed him no end. After all that is the stock and trade of every experienced hustler and Dan was quick to recognize it, for he was no dummy.

He liked my angles and ideas too, so in no time flat we became buddies. So much so that he invited me to the table stake stud poker game he held every Saturday night in his Beverly Hills mansion.

I did mighty well in those games, because I could deal a neat second or bottom if and when necessary. In fact every time I handled the deck the top card became quite dusty. I'd take good care of Dan in the games, so he'd always finish a winner, too. While he suspected he was getting the edge he never murmured or asked questions.

And that's another reason I liked the big guy.

One night after a game in which we both scored big, Dan gave me the office to remain after the suckers left as he had something confidential to discuss with me. I did and he gave me a fast rundown about his one and only living Uncle who owned, trained and raced a cheap string of selling platers on the leaky roof circuit which I knew meant small tracks.

Uncle was his problem because with great regularity he'd put the bite on Dan on account of some beetle in his stable who was troubled with corns or bunions, falling arches, dandruff, or just plain colic which was some round-robin. His constant 'touch' was usually for veterinary fees that was fast becoming too tough to handle.

Dan was in a quandary as to what to do about it and asked my advice.

"He keeps telling me I can write it off as a tax loss," blurted Dan, "and keeps milking me like a Guernsey!"

"I know you like my ideas, pal," said I, "so I'm going to hit you with one."

"Shoot, Johnny!" instructed the big boy. "I'm listening."

"We both like to gamble, don't we?" I asked. He nodded and grinned, so I continued, "Why don't we go fifty-fifty, buy just *one good* racehorse, and stake your Uncle to him. Let him keep the purse or any part of it that he wins. All we want to know is when the

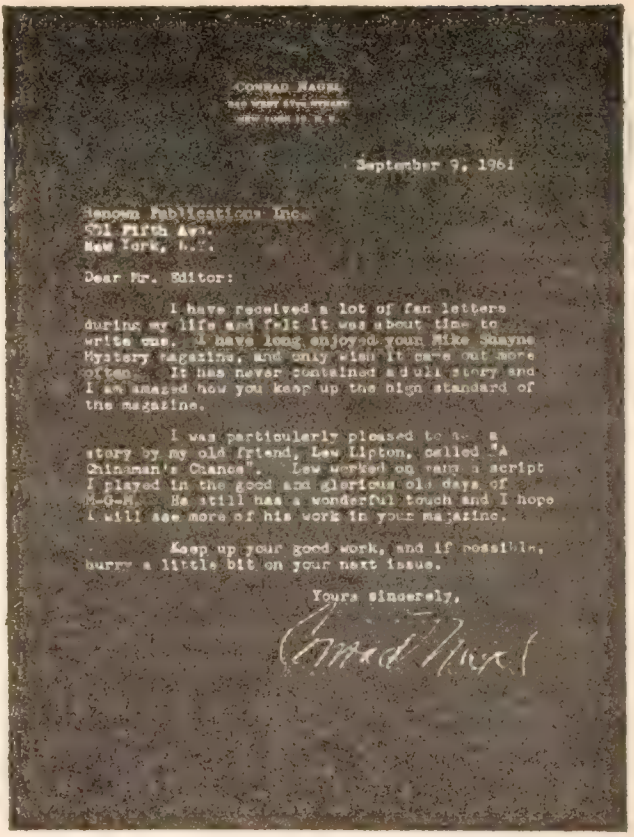
Conrad Nagel

LIKES

JOHNNY,

THE

EDGE



CONRAD NAGEL

September 9, 1961

Renown Publications Inc.
501 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Editor:

I have received a lot of fan letters during my life and felt it was about time to write one. I have long enjoyed your Mike Shayne Mystery magazine, and only wish it came out more often. It has never contained a dull story and I am amazed how you keep up the high standard of the magazine.

I was particularly pleased to [illegible] a story by my old friend, Lew Lipton, called "A Chinaman's Chance". Lew worked on many a script I played in the good and glorious old days of M-G-M. He still has a wonderful touch and I hope I will see more of his work in your magazine.

Keep up your good work, and if possible, hurry a little bit on your next issue.

Yours sincerely,

Conrad Nagel

---

horse is ready so we can cop a solid bet.

"If your Uncle is as good a trainer as you say, we should be able to cash in fast and be in front the first shake out of the box. Then he can get rid of all of the oat destroyers he has now and let them go for the end book!"

"One helluva idea!" enthused Dan, then paused, "but after all a real good thoroughbred racer costs a hatful."

"Not with my connections," I assured him, taking a long-shot stab on making them.

Dan was in deep thought a brief moment then said, "Someone besides Uncle would have to oversee and manage a crack racer if we bought one. I can't, Johnny, because I'm under contract and have to work at the studio making movies. Or did you forget!"

"I can handle everything," I said. "Just leave it to me. I have a way of getting a pipe line direct to Colonel Polk Culpepper who has a top notch breeding place in Louisville called the Peaceful Hour Stock Farm."

Again a grin gave Dan a chid-

ing look. He quipped, "Why do you always insist upon saying 'I', Johnny?"

For the first time I began to burn and replied in raised voice, "I thought you knew by now that whenever I say 'I' I mean *We!*"

"Sorry," he said apologetically. "When do you want to go to Kentucky?" he asked, then added: "I agree that it's worth a gamble."

"Whenever it's post time at the Burbank Airport," I replied.

"Okay, Johnny," he exclaimed, "do the best you can and we'll be partners!"

He duked me, then I gave him the "good night!"

"BOWLER'S A NICE, well bred horse," Colonel Culpepper told me as he pointed to the chestnut colt with fine conformation. "He used to be a crack jumper," explained the old gentlemanly Southerner, "but recently I've had my trainer, Rex Lloyd, convert him to the flats. He's fast, too!"

"Without the shadow of a doubt, Colonel," said I, "and I'd like to buy him. That is, if he isn't too expensive."

"Tell you what I'll do, son. This thoroughbred is as sound as a dollar and his blood-lines go 'way back to my favorite, Pin Boy. Bowler is a steal at twenty-five thousand but as long as you say that your father was an old personal friend of my very dearest colleague, the late Colonel Lee Jefferson Maddox, you can have Bowler for ten thousand. Is that fair?"

"Fair enough, Colonel," I agreed, hoping he wouldn't question me any further about my father's supposed friendship with the late Colonel Maddox, which was a slight edge, I had dug up to get a real bargain. "It's a deal!"

We duked, then strolled into his spacious Colonial home at his famous Peaceful Hour Farm where I wrote out a non-bouncing check, received a receipt and made arrangements to have Bowler shipped to Dan Dawson's ranch in Sunnyland, California.

It was the first time I had ever owned or was a part owner of a racehorse although I had touted many of them to make a fast buck. Anyway, that's how the Sunnyland stable was born.

Bowler was really a beauty and shipped well. Dan was so crazy about him he never questioned the price or asked to see the receipt. He just forked over a check for ten grand for *his* half of the supposed price which gave me another slight edge to say the least.

Then we called in Uncle and went into a hasty conference regarding the future of Bowler. I suggested and it was quickly agreed that we should race our hoped for breadwinner at Tiajuana, Mexico, which was only a two hour ride from Dan's domicile in Beverly Hills.

As self-appointed manager I instructed Uncle to start our horse in an early race—a $2,000 top and bottom claimer, as a feeler. It was a daring thing to do as other horse owners in the same event were also familiar with Bowler's pedigree but probably figured him broken-down or a 'has been' which was fortunate for us, because not one put in a claim for him or we would have been out of luck.

However, the wary shylock bookmakers at the track quickly chalked up a price of 4/5 against Bowler. As the overwhelming favorite in the field, we saw no profit in winning at such short odds, therefore, I instructed Uncle to tell our jockey to just take a ride and run Bowler dead last, which he did.

He was beaten fourteen lengths by a band of cheap pigs that he could have run away and hid from. Fact of the matter is, if our jockey had ridden instead of Paul Revere, we'd still be subjects of the King of England.

Aware that time and patience was necessary I further instructed Uncle to keep raising Bowler in class and also to keep running him dead last or next to last. My instructions were followed so perfectly that the cagey bookies were now convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt, especially after a dismal showing in his last twelve starts, that Bowler was a dud and eligible for the glue factory.

They kept raising the odds on him with every start. So, from his debut as a 4/5 prohibitive favorite one day, six months later, he was entered in the 7th heat—a $6,000 allowance race with odds of 20/1 chalked up against him. We read it in the sporting page of the evening newspaper with great elation.

That night, the night before the race, we called a hurried conference in Dan's house with the result we agreed to 'send it in' and began betting out-of-town bookies taking the overnight odds which was a custom those days with wise guys like us. In that way, the 'comeback' money could come back to

the track and still not kill or affect the price we got regardless of the mutuel machines or handbooks, and Tiajuana had both—totalizers and 'chalk men' as they called bookmakers.

Unbeknown to Dan or Uncle I had made connections with the bookies we bet with with the confidential understanding I was to receive 'juice' meaning a kickback percentage of the money we bet—win or lose—which was another edge. In other words, I couldn't possibly lose.

The odds we got were 20-8 and 4 across the board and by the time we were through betting on Bowler we stood to win over 100 big ones, or more than 50 grand apiece!

It was late afternoon when the horses paraded to the post for the 7th at Tijuana. It was the first and only time we had entered Bowler in a late race. The sun began to go down which caused long dark shadows to fall across the track from the inner railing that circled the oval beginning at the home stretch turn. Never before in any previous race had shadows anything like, or as dense, fallen on the track.

Our jockey Deke Collins was instructed to take the lead at the start and hold it all the way to the finish line. Being a lightning fast breaker, our pilot got away the second the buzzer sounded and the starting gate flew open!

At the quarter, it was Bowler by a length. At the half, Bowler by two. At the three-quarters it was Bowler by four and rounding into the stretch turn it was Bowler by —six!

He was coming down the lane in a gallop all by himself when the unexpected happened! Seeing long dark shadows streaked across the track and obviously mistaking them for barriers, the converted jumper suddenly tried to jump over them!

At the first leap he nearly unseated his unsuspecting rider who threw both arms around the neck of his mount and hung on for dear life! As Bowler continued leaping and jumping over imaginary brush or barriers like a bucking broncho, the Judges in the stand and other racing officials watched in horror, petrified with fright.

They couldn't believe their eyes as Bowler and his pilot did an act that was reminiscent of dogs ridden by monkeys in Ringling Brothers. They just stood transfixed with field-glasses glued to their eyes at the weird sight.

At the sixteenth pole, Bowler suddenly balked, stiffened and refused to take the last imaginary jump with the result that the entire field of horses not alone caught up, but thundered past him like a Cavalry charge and left Bowler dead last again.

But this time it was on the level! And a cardiac situation as far as I was concerned.

Pandemonium reigned. A near riot ensued!

Dan was at the studio so missed the rodeo or circus act so naturally I, as co-owner and manager, and Uncle, as trainer, were immediately summoned to the Judges stand for questioning. They and the stewards were sizzling with anger. Frothing at the mouth.

A villainous looking official with pointed mustachio and flashing black beady eyes accused us of hopping up Bowler and threatened that if any trace of stimulants such as a fireball or needle-work were found in the receiving barn where our supposed bread winner had been quickly yanked for a saliva test, we would be ruled off all tracks for life. Nothing less!

We were forced to wait, surrounded by musical comedy looking gendarmes until the track vet returned and reported—no findings! Then we were released and politely informed to get the hell out of Mexico and take our loco horse with us, but pronto! If we didn't we were warned we'd be escorted across the border by the police!

They acted as if they were full of tequilla, so we lammed as fast as we could.

Safe again in the United States of America I gladly presented my half interest in Bowler to Uncle, then took a solemn oath and made a resolution that I'd never have anything to do with a converted Jumper again. Even with an edge!

"FIDDLING AROUND"

by LEW LIPTON

A Brand-New *JOHNNY, THE EDGE* Story Next Month

MURDER Strikes Out

Watching the New York Empires in spring training was a new experience for Lucy Hamilton. But Mike saw foreshadowed . . . a crime play that wasn't new.

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

By BRETT HALLIDAY

MIKE SHAYNE turned to Lucy Hamilton. "Angel," he said with amusement, "stop powdering your nose if you want to see a first-class ball club in action."

Lucy squinted in the sunlight that bathed the playing field and looked in consternation at the multitude of uniformed players going through their paces. The dizzying confusion of spring training with its infield practice and soaring white baseballs to the other reaches of the greensward baffled her.

At the batting cage, a wire screen thrown up

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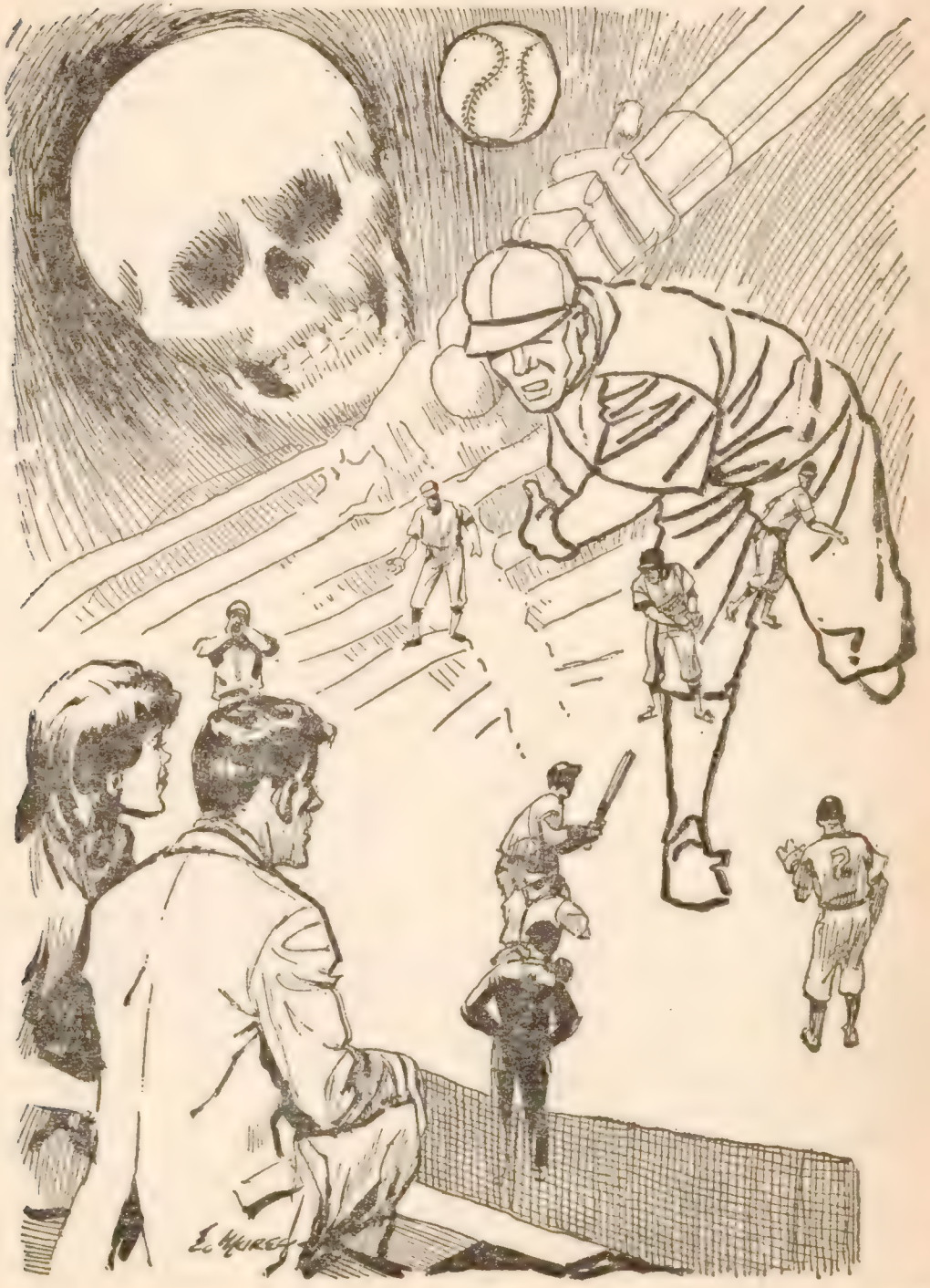
MIKE SHAYNE PLAYS ON THE WINNING SIDE—AS ALWAYS



to corral the ball thrown past the batters, players were stepping up to the plate to take their swings with machine-like regularity.

Lucy pouted. "I wanted to see a game."

Shayne's red eyebrows met as he laughed. "A million kids in this country would like to see the New York Empires in batting practice and you're complaining. Sit tight, in about twenty minutes the actual game will start."

Lucy sighed. "You say they're good—so I guess they must be. But I could never tell just by watching them."

"Foreigner," sniffed Michael Shayne. "They've won the pennant three years in a row and three Saturdays from now when they open the season in New York, the odds will be five to one they do it again."

His secretary shifted uncomfortably on the hard benches, a bank of which made up the left side grandstands of the park. "Fine thing. If they make so much money, you'd think they could put air-cushions on these seats."

Shayne laughed, his eyes following the rhythm of play on the field. "The seats are just as hard in New York. Isn't this better than sitting at your desk on Flagler Street typing up my letters?"

Lucy smiled, her nice nose wrinkling attractively.

"What do *you* think, Michael?"

A batter down at home plate had swung cleanly and the ball shot upward to a dizzying height. It didn't go very far though. It came down on the third base line where a big, broad-shouldered man neatly caught it. A ripple of applause trickled through the stands. Shayne applauded too.

"Good old Ben," he grunted. "Hasn't played in ten years and still as graceful as ever."

"Ben who?" Lucy asked timidly.

"Ben Arlington. He's in the Hall of Fame now. One of the greatest catchers of all time. But more importantly, the new manager of the Empires. He took over when Pete Carlson died last year."

"Oh," Lucy said.

Shayne laughed again. "All new to you, angel? Well, don't be upset. Baseball is a special world all by itself. Just like the private detective business—" The redhead broke off as a foghorn voice cut in on him shouting, "Shayne! Mike Shayne!"

Lucy jumped and Shayne's eyes narrowed. Coming up the runway and heading straight in their direction was the big, broad-shouldered man who had made the catch at third base. The redhead grinned and stood up.

"Ben Arlington," he said. "Your eyes must be as good as ever to pick me out of this crowd. This is my secretary, Lucy Hamilton."

Ben jerked his head in greeting.

His face was brown and healthy, his blue eyes alert. "Mike, am I glad to see you. I'd forgotten Miami was your home base. Still a private detective?"

The question was over-blunt, unexpected, but Shayne did not miss the note of urgency in Arlington's voice.

"I am still at it, Ben," the redhead said.

Ben Arlington's blue eyes danced.

"Mike, will you come see me tonight? I'm at the Clearview Hotel. Suite Fourteen A. Make it around eight o'clock. It's rather important." Michael Shayne nodded. Ben Arlington went on: "Well, I have to get back on the field, Mike. Will you come?"

"I'll be there, Ben."

"I'll expect you then, Mike. It was nice to have met you, Miss Hamilton." Arlington turned and clattered down the runway and went back onto the crowded playing field.

Lucy Hamilton chuckled. "A ballpark is the last place I'd expect you to find a client, Michael."

Shayne barely nodded. Something about Ben Arlington worried him.

"You can say that again, Lucy. I wonder what's bothering Ben." With typical single-mindedness he pushed the irritation from his mind and concentrated his attention on the New York Empires in spring training.

II

MICHAEL SHAYNE was sitting comfortably in the contour chair closest to Ben Arlington's desk, idly shaking the drink in his hand as he stared at the manager of the Empires.

"Mike," Ben Arlington said. "This talk has to be kept strictly under wraps. If the papers get wind of it, we're all in trouble."

Shayne tugged at his left earlobe as he scanned the anxious look on his friend's face. "That's not quite the right way to start unwinding, Ben. You can trust me to keep it to myself—you should know that!"

"Of course, Mike." Arlington's sun-tanned face relaxed in a smile. "We don't want another Black Sox scandal. And I don't want to muff my first big job as manager. I gave my life to Baseball. It's all I care about."

Shayne smiled. "Let's have it from the top of the batting order, Ben. I'm a detective not a clairvoyant. What's it all about?"

Arlington controlled himself. Shayne could see the big man was perplexed. Nothing had ever confused Ben Arlington on a ballfield. He had parlayed class, skill and nerve into a .325 lifetime batting average, membership in the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown and the manager job of the top club in the league. But now big Ben looked too confused to jibe with the image

of one of the scrappiest backstops in major league history.

"Mike," Arlington said, and cleared his throat. "The Empires have won the flag three years in a row. I'm figuring to make it four. We open in New York in three weeks and we're in great shape. I got the bench and the players to repeat. The sports writers say the Empires are just too knee-deep in talent to miss. Or maybe it's just Lefty Joe Llewellyn like everybody else thinks it is."

Shayne laughed. "I'll settle for Lefty. A pitcher who wins more than seventy games in three seasons doesn't exactly cripple you. If his arm is as good as ever, I'll order my World Series tickets right now."

Arlington shuddered. "Then I won't be wasting my breath if I tell you Lefty has been *approached.* The Mob's been sending him fan mail."

Shayne blinked, set his drink down gently. "Come again?"

"You heard me. Ever since we left for this Southern swing to Miami before we head back for the opener, Lefty's been getting a letter a day asking him to throw the game on Opening Day. Five thousand bucks is the price, for every run he gives up."

"Go on. There must be more."

"There is," Arlington said grimly. "Lefty finally showed me all the mail. The letters are never signed. With that kind of dough at stake, you can be damned sure the Mob is behind it."

"New York, or here?"

Arlington threw up his hands. "I don't know. I keep waiting for a messenger. Somebody to come forth. A go-between. But so far—nothing but these damn aggravating letters. It's got me off my feed, Mike."

Shayne's red eyebrows drew together in a frown. "You ought to go to the Commissioner with this, Ben. You know that. Failure to report bribes means getting kicked out of Baseball for life."

"Don't I know it?" Arlington shuddered again. "Mike, the report's in my desk, in triplicate. But when I saw you today, I wondered if you couldn't help in some way. This is my first big job, the chance of my life. Even the breath of scandal bothers me. And then there's Lefty. They might harm him if they know I'm blowing the whistle. And you know how people are. Even a hint and they start wondering. Where there's smoke—"

"But Lefty's record—"

"That's just it," Arlington said helplessly. "I see you haven't been reading the sports pages lately. Lefty's been tagged all Spring. Every time he pitches a few innings, he gets clobbered. Of course it's only spring training and he's loosening up. But he's looked like a busher every time out. I know a winter layoff hurts a pitch-

er but how do you think his ERA will sound on top of these letters?"

"What *is* his earned run average?"

Arlington winced. "About sixteen point zero. That's sixteen runs for every nine innings."

"Ouch," said Shayne. "I see what you mean."

"You've got to help, Mike. I don't want Lefty developing a complex. It may ruin our chances. I know he's clean but you know how pitchers are. This thing's got him worried and it won't help his frame of mind out there on the mound. You've got to flush these chiselers out for me."

Shayne lit a cigarette carefully. He blew a smoke ring and watched it hang in the closed atmosphere of the hotel room.

"What do you want me to do, Ben?"

Arlington jabbed a finger at him. "Tomorrow we play another game with the Sox. We're in Miami for three games. Come on out and look around. Lefty's going the first six innings. I figure they got to make their move soon, whoever they are. Maybe they'll approach him in person this time. I want you there if they do. I can count on you. The park cops wouldn't be enough."

Shayne nodded. "Does Lefty Llewellyn like private detectives shadowing him?"

"I don't care what he likes," Arlington growled, extending an

orange pasteboard across the desk. "I'm the manager. This'll get you a box seat on the third base side of the infield."

"Your dugout?"

"Our dugout."

"Okay, Ben," the redhead said, easing his tall figure erect. "See you at the ballpark, Mr. Manager."

III

MICHAEL SHAYNE entered his Flagler Street office the next morning at ten o'clock. It was a fine day for a ball game. White clouds hung idle in the Miami sky and balmy breezes stole gently in from Biscayne Bay. In spite of the threat hanging over the future of the New York Empires, the redhead was in a cheerful frame of mind as he parked his car and ambled into the outer office.

He found Lucy Hamilton at the

water cooler. She looked sensibly attractive in a powder-blue tailored suit.

Shayne looked at his watch. "Call me promptly at twelve o'clock angel," he said. "I'll be inside checking over that report on our last client."

Lucy did not seem to find the remark amusing. "Michael, how did you make out with Ben Arlington?" she asked.

"He's invited me to the ball game today," Shayne said. "He wants me to make like a talent scout."

Lucy frowned. "That's funny."

"What's funny? Sox versus the Empires or Michael Shayne, Talent Scout?"

"Neither," Lucy Hamilton said crisply. "But a bulletin just came over the radio in your office. That pitcher—what's his name—Lefty something or other—was rushed to the hospital with a severe attack of abdominal cramps. Something he had for breakfast, the radio said. He was going to pitch today, wasn't he?"

Michael Shayne calmly fished a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his inside coat pocket and thumbed one out. He took his time lighting up, a thoughtful frown on his face.

"What hospital angel?"

"Miami Hospital. His condition isn't serious though, if that's what you're worried about."

"Anything that keeps him out of a ball game would worry me," Shayne said. He rubbed his nose, then cursed and started for the door. "If Ben calls, tell him where I've gone. Nobody else, understand? Not even Will Gentry. I'll ring him later if I have to."

Lucy started to protest. "But Michael—"

"That takes care of it, angel," Shayne said and left without further comment.

Seconds later, he was burning up the asphalt towards the hospital. The orange pasteboard for the game mocked him from its position on the windshield where he had tucked it earlier that morning.

LEFTY LLEWELLYN looked incongruous lying in a hospital bed. He was a robustly built man whose ballplayer's tan was just a shade less deep than mahogany. Not even the way his lips were drawn together in pain could rob him of the label "the picture of health."

Michael Shayne stood at the foot of the bed and stared down at him. Lefty Joe Llewellyn smiled up at him weakly.

"I guess I should have stuck to Wheaties, the Breakfast of Champions. But who would ever figure plain old bacon, pancakes and coffee would do me in like this?" He sighed. "Glad you sent Arlington back to the hotel, Shayne. He was fussing over me like an old lady."

Shayne nodded sympathetically. "What did the doctor say?"

Lefty screwed up his face. "Ptomaine. What else?"

"I'm not so sure," Shayne said. "Not after what Ben Arlington told me. Letters are one thing. This is something else."

"No, Shayne." Lefty shook his head. "I thought of that too. But it doesn't stand up. I just ate something that didn't set well."

Shayne studied him. "Are you sure? These clowns could be out to get you."

"I'll play ball," Lefty said grimly. "But not with gangsters and cheap hoods. To hell with them. They can send me a thousand letters. I don't care."

"Any letters today, Lefty?"

He looked bewildered. "No, come to think of it. This is the first day they missed. I wonder why."

Shayne smiled. "Stop wondering. Bacon, pancakes and coffee. There must be something to it. They're through advising you, Lefty. This was their first warning."

Lefty shrugged. "I know you know you're stuff, Shayne. You're tops in your own league. But I think you're wrong. Who'd be cooperative after this kind of treatment?"

"A scared man," Shayne suggested.

"No dice," Lefty Llewellyn said fervently. "They don't know me. They picked the wrong guy to fool around with. I don't scare easily."

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in," Shayne said tersely.

A wiry tall man whose face reflected the Florida sun and wrinkles came briskly in. His eyes darted to the redhead. He had a box of flowers under his arm.

"Good Lord, Lefty. Stop having visitors and get some rest, will you? This is no joke. You want to be in top shape for opening day, don't you?"

Lefty Llewellyn laughed. "Relax, will you, Doc? Oh, Shayne, this is Doctor Goswell."

"Hi," Michael Shayne said.

Dr. Goswell squinted. "Reporter?"

"No. Detective."

Lefty Llewellyn laughed as Goswell's bird-like eyes opened alarmingly wide. He moved to a sitting-up position in bed. He groaned and Dr. Goswell forgot Shayne and went to his side, putting the box of flowers on a chair.

"Lefty, you'll just have to take it easy—"

"Okay, Doc, Okay. Who's the flowers from?"

"Oh." Goswell made a face. "Some woman down in the lobby was leaving them at the reception desk as I came in. I offered to take them up to you. Guess you made a new girl friend, Handsome. You and your public."

"Well, let's see them, for Pete's sake. Maybe she left her name and phone number. Was she good-looking?"

"A doll," said Goswell, passing

the box but keeping his eyes on Michael Shayne. "Big girl, too. Tall, well stacked. A brunette."

Lefty Llewellyn started to chuckle appreciatively, his wiry fingers ripping into the box of flowers. Then he cursed volubly. The sudden roar of his voice startled Dr. Goswell. But not Michael Shayne.

Disgustedly, Lefty Llewellyn passed the white card that had been enclosed with a dozen red roses. The flowers smelled sweet but the message on the card stunk to high heaven.

Shayne read: THIS TIME IT'S ONLY A STOMACH-ACHE. HEARTBURN IS WORSE. There was no signature.

"Well," Shayne said, staring at Lefty Llewellyn across the top of the long flower box. "I'd say you needed a bodyguard, wouldn't you?"

"Sure," growled Lefty. "You going to hold my hand while I pitch too?"

"No," Shayne said. "I've got a better idea than that."

"Like what, for instance?"

Before answering, Shayne reached down into the flower box, broke the stem of a rose and inserted a fragrant red one into his lapel. He sniffed it lightly.

"Like finding a tall, well-filled out brunette who delivers lovely roses to sick ballplayers."

Lefty Joe Llewellyn blinked. Dr. Goswell gaped.

Smiling, Shayne left the sick room.

IV

THE CAB-STAND in front of the hospital might just as well not have been there. All the drivers whom the redhead interviewed had no recollection of a fare answering Dr. Goswell's picturesque description. Nor did any of them remember seeing a brunette carrying a box of flowers. Shayne thanked them for their help. The next move practicly spelled itself out.

First, Shayne called Lucy Hamilton at the office, gave her the details and kept her busy most of the afternoon calling all the florists in the vicinity. Then he dialed Ben Arlington at his hotel.

Arlington was out, so Shayne left a message. He pondered through a whole cigarette before he decided to call Will Gentry. Gentry was in and also in a bad mood.

"Yes, Mike? Try to keep it brief, will you? I'm all tied up with a citizen's committee screaming for action on police behavior in school zones—"

"This won't take long, Will. Just wondered if any of the big fellows from the East or West were in our fair city."

Gentry's voice sounded surprised. "Yes—a real biggie this time—Frankie Kellin arrived yesterday from New York with a

bunch of his goons. You know how I like to keep tabs on those mugs when they come to Miami. But just how does it concern you, Mike? Class reunion or something?"

Shayne laughed. "Could be. You wouldn't tell me where he's staying, would you?"

"I would if you'd tell me just why you're so interested, Mike." Gentry was no longer in a hurry to hang up. His tone was guarded.

"Will, I'll tell you tonight. Around five if you're at your office. If not, ring me at my office. Deal?"

Gentry sighed. "The Lone Ranger rides again. Okay. Kellin and Company are registered at the Clearview. Frankie says he's here to take in the ball games and some track action. What do you say?"

"Five o'clock. And not a second sooner." Shayne hung up thoughtfully.

Five minutes later, he had made up his mind. He drove into midtown Miami, and cruised until he found a parking spot a full block away from the Clearview Hotel. Then he went into a combination cafeteria and diner and ordered some coffee and toast.

There was a lot to think about before he rushed into Kellin's presence, if he was going to at all. It was also time enough to call Lucy Hamilton to see if she had come up with anything on the florist

shops. She had. Her voice was elated when Shayne rang the office.

"Michael, I hit pay dirt on the fourth try. The manager of the Bolan Florists remembers a girl this morning. The description fits exactly. And guess what? She charged the flowers instead of paying for them. So we got an address."

Shayne's lips tightened in satisfaction.

"Good, angel."

"She's registered in Room Twenty A at the Clearview. Her name is Nona Fowler. Ring a bell?"

"On the nose, Lucy. Nona Fowler happens to be the main dish of a bigshot New York gangster named Frankie Kellin."

"Oh, Michael, does that mean that you—"

"Take it easy, Lucy. Nothing's happened yet. You just sit tight. You'll be hearing from me at five."

The redhead made one more call before squeezing out of the

booth. He dialed Ben Arlington again. This time, the manager of the Empires was in.

"Mike! Where the hell are you? We have to talk."

"Easy, Ben. Or you'll be in sick bay with Lefty."

"I know, Mike." Arlington's voice fell. "I'm afraid I'm being watched. And now I know who's been sending those crummy messages."

Shayne laughed. "I know too. Frankie Kellin."

"You know—?" Arlington erupted. "Mike, have you been talking to anybody?"

"Simmer down, Ben. Don't forget your manners. We ran into a little luck. A dumb girl friend of Frankie's. She made a bad play. I'll tell you about it later. Look. Have Frankie or his goons made any move at you yet?"

"No," he rumbled. "But I expect them to burst in here any minute. They're all over the hotel. Sitting in the lobby in plain view. Where are you?"

"Give me five minutes," said Shayne. "And don't do anything foolish. You're not dealing with small time operators."

The redhead walked into the Clearview Hotel shortly thereafter and took the elevator up to the fourteenth floor. He didn't ride alone. As soon as he entered the car, two blue-jowled men fell into step on both sides of him. They said nothing but Shayne could feel their eyes giving him a careful going-over.

When he alighted on the fourteenth, the men relaxed. As Shayne stepped from the car, he saw them smiling at each other as the door closed. The redhead shook his head wonderingly. Frankie Kellin didn't take very many chances either.

In room 14A, Ben Arlington was a mountain of impatience. He strode forward as Shayne entered. He looked tired and run down, the crow's feet around his blue eyes more prominent than ever.

"Take it easy, Ben," Shayne murmured.

"I'm worried about Lefty," Arlington said. "If they'd killed that kid, I never would have forgiven myself. Mike, I'm for seeing Frankie Kellin right now and having this whole mess out in the open."

Shayne eyed him closely. "Ben, Lefty is strong enough to take it. I've seen him. No goons will make him throw games. He'd rather be dead. You love baseball, too. Just because you're a manager now, don't lose your grip. We can handle Frankie. If we can't then we'll go to the Commissioner. But it's got to be done properly."

Ben Arlington nodded. "You're right, of course. But it's this damn waiting for them to come forward that I can't take."

A heavy voice spoke from the direction of the doorway.

"You don't have to wait no more. You call, I come."

Michael Shayne and Ben Arlington swung around like a double-play combination. There were three men in the doorway. One of them was slowly closing the door. Shayne recognized two of them as the blue-jowled escorts of the elevator.

The third man, the man who had spoken, was shorter and heavier. But there was no mistaking him. Frankie Kellin's picture had been splashed across front pages for years.

"Relax you two," Kellin growled. "We gotta talk. And we're only going to talk this once."

VI

BEN ARLINGTON'S tanned face suddenly exploded with anger. He got up from his chair and took a giant stride toward Frankie Kellin. Shayne moved just as quickly. He stepped between Arlington and Kellin before the two goons flanking Kellin could go for their guns.

"Easy, Ben. You'll only get yourself marked up for nothing. I imagine Kellin just wants to talk business."

Arlington subsided and so did the goons. Frankie Kellin looked admiringly at Shayne.

"Smart, Shayne. Very smart. My business includes you too."

The redhead's eyebrows rose in surprise. "You know me, Kellin?"

Frankie Kellin laughed. "The whole world knows you." He let it go at that and turned his attention back to Arlington. He did not sit down. He didn't look as if he intended to stay very long.

"Arlington, we don't talk anymore after this. Lefty Llewellyn knows the score now. When his stomach gets better, I figure he'll lose the opening game. You better figure that way too."

"I don't figure anything, you cheap crook," Arlington gritted.

Frankie Kellin shook his head.

"A ball game. One lousy game. Who cares? Stop playing the dope, Arlington. There's dough in it for you too. You want to be a dead

manager. You figure it my way, right?"

Ben Arlington cursed. "The hell I do. Baseball is clean. It's stayed clean for more than thirty years. No amount of money in the world will change that. I think you're out of your mind, Kellin. Stick to the numbers or track and all the other rackets. We're not doing business."

One of the two men with Kellin stirred. Shayne tensed. But Kellin laughed lightly and shook his head. The goon relaxed with a mutter.

"See?" Frankie Kellin chuckled. "You're not making sense. You make Louie very mad. Louis pops people who talk back to me. Louie will kill Lefty if he wins that opener in New York. You'd better get used to the idea, Arlington. The fix is in. We stand to collect a fortune all over the country. Only if Lefty loses. And we want him pitching opening day. You guys are so good you could easily win if he isn't in there throwing the game for us. He wins and your managing days are over. We want to make sure he is on our side on opening day. Otherwise—" He let the threat sink in.

Michael Shayne smiled. "He's a lifetime manager, Kellin."

Under his banter, the redhead was thinking fast.

Frankie Kellin shrugged. "How much difference is there? He tells his pitchers what to do, don't he? And Shayne, you'd better forget all about this too, if you value your health."

Arlington turned to the redhead. "Mike, let's rush them and throw them out. I'd rather the whole world knew about this now."

"Take it easy, Ben." Shayne looked at Kellin. "Okay, we got the message. You can run along now, Frankie."

Louie growled and the other goon's face reddened with fury. But Frankie Kellin kept on chuckling and moved toward the door. He deftly jerked a hand. Louie swung the door open.

He turned in the entrance, his dark face still placid.

"I'm sure you'll do the right thing, Arlington. The wrong thing will put everybody in the cemetery. What the hell is one ball game more or less to you and the Empires? You're going to win the pennant anyway."

The question went unanswered. The hotel door closed behind them. Ben Arlington growled. Mike Shayne watched him sympathetically. He knew full well how much Ben would have enjoyed just cleaning up the room with Kellin and his goon squad.

"Mike," Ben mumbled thickly. "We gotta do something. I don't want Lefty to get hurt. Baseball comes first but Lefty's a married man with kids."

Shayne dug out his cigarettes. "Ben, in the old days, what would you have given for the opportunity

of learning the other club's strategy before a big game? It would have meant a lot, wouldn't it?"

Arlington looked at him wearily. "Talk sense, Mike."

The redhead laughed.

"Kellin's just given us his whole line of offense. Now we know what we have to do."

Arlington was unconvinced. "Do we?"

"We do. Leave the details to me. Kellin overplayed his hand by putting in an appearance. He should have stayed in the background." Shayne eyed Ben Arlington. "Let Lefty pitch tomorrow. You think he'll be up to it?"

"Yes, but, Mike—"

"But nothing. You pitch Llewellyn and the sports writers will pick it up big. Especially after coming out of a sick bed. They'll flood the papers with copy. And I'll take Kellin off your back for all time. So you can concentrate on winning the pennant."

Ben Arlington's eyes glowed. "You do that, Mike. And I'll drop a thousand bucks into your lap for services to the Empires."

Shayne shrugged. "Get hopping then and start the ball rolling. Call the papers. I want to see Lefty Llewellyn pitch a game myself."

VII

THE TALL, well-filled-out brunette came out of her hotel about three o'clock. She didn't hail a

taxi. She began to walk in a direction south of the hotel. The uniformed doorman raised his hat in a pre-arranged signal. Michael Shayne put his car into gear and eased it onto the thoroughfare. Innocuously, without seeming to do so, he tailed Nona Fowler. For a five dollar tip, the redhead had had the woman registered in Room 20A fingered for him.

She made it easy. She was a fast walker for a big girl. So the redhead was able to drive without crawling—a movement which would have been suspicious to an interested onlooker.

When Nona Fowler was a good five blocks from the hotel, Shayne slid the car to a stop about ten yards ahead of her. He kept the motor running. In the rear-view mirror, he could see her coming quickly on high heels. Her tall body was wrapped as carefully as a cigar in a red-sheath dress. She

looked tough but Shayne knew how stupid she had been about the flowers.

Shayne leaned over and opened the side door. Nona Fowler was nearly abreast of the car. "Just a moment," he called softly. "We've a little something to talk about."

She flung an angry glance at the redhead, intending to walk by without a comment. But her expression dissolved into anxiety when she saw the hard look on Shayne's face.

"What do you want?" Nona Fowler's voice was a dull rasp of feminine sound. "I don't know you, mister."

"We'll fix that," Shayne said. "Climb in and nothing serious will happen to you. I'd advise you not to be stubborn about it. This is for your own good."

She moved closer, her heavy hips undulating. "If this is a snatch, I better warn you, mister. I'm Frankie Kellin's girl friend and—"

"I know that, Nona," Shane interrupted. "That's why I want to talk to you."

She relaxed a little. But not much. "What for?"

Shayne grinned. "Don't you realize Frankie would like to know all about that stupid play about the flowers you delivered to Lefty Llewellyn. You shouldn't've charged them, Nona. But I'm here to see to it that he doesn't find out about it. And you'll probably stay alive if he never finds out."

Her eyes mirrored the sudden fear that showed through them. Visibly fighting to control the tremor that was taking hold of her, she bit her lips. Her narrowed eyes tried to read the redhead's face.

"Where are you going to take me?" she managed to ask in a hushed voice, as she slipped into the car.

Shayne pressed the accelerator and the car shot from the curb. "Like the man said, Nona. We'll know when we get there, won't we?"

Nona Fowler shuddered. She shrank into her corner of the front seat. Without saying another word, Michael Shayne drove her to Headquarters, Miami Police Department.

VIII

"COME ON, Miss Fowler," Will Gentry said quietly. "We've got the witnesses. The Bolan Florists can identify you as the woman who bought the flowers and charged them to Frankie Kellin's room at the Clearview. A Dr. Groswell and Shayne here can testify to the threatening note that was in the box with the flowers. Extortion and threats against Lefty Llewellyn. You're in a tight spot, Nona."

"Especially when Frankie finds out about it," Michael Shayne reminded her mildly.

Nona Fowler said dully. "I want a lawyer."

"A lawyer won't help you," Shayne said. "Frankie will want to put you in the cemetery."

She paled. "I didn't know about the note. All Frankie told me was to bring the flowers to the hospital for Lefty. He gave me the card to put in the box but I never read it. I figured it was *Get Well* wishes or something like that. But I wanted to do a little extra shopping, so I charged the flowers. God, what a rock I pulled. Frankie will kill me for this!"

"Exactly," Shayne said. "So do yourself a favor. Gentry will give you all the police protection you need until this blows over. Isn't that right, Will?"

"Sure." Gentry nodded, and extended a prepared statement across the table. "We won't let anything happen to you, Miss Fowler. Kellin won't be in a position to hurt anybody when we get through with him."

Nona Fowler bit her lip. "If I rat on Frankie, he can have me killed. He's got contacts, friends —dangerous ones."

"Nona," Shayne said calmly. "As it stands you're facing a long stretch behind bars for committing a felony. If you want to do the time for something you say you're innocent of, that's okay with us. But if Frankie set you up for the fall, you're dumber than I thought you were." He smiled at her coldly. "I guess you'll still look good to a man in ten years."

He was talking her language. She understood him. She shivered under the sheath dress.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked hoarsely.

"Sign this," Gentry said. "And if you want to, go back to the hotel as if nothing had happened."

Nona Fowler threw back her head and laughed. It was a short, brittle laugh.

"You must be crazy. Both of you. When I sign that, I sign my death warrant and you know it. I'll sign it on one condition, or it's no deal."

Shayne and Gentry exchanged glances. Gentry sighed. "Okay, Nona," he said. "What's the deal?"

"My signature," Nona Fowler said, "for a nice safe cell to stay in until you close in on Frankie."

Shayne smiled. "Any objection to that arrangement, Will?"

Gentry shook his head.

With hurrying fingers, Nona Fowler scratched her name on the paper. The Gentry buzzed for a policeman and she was escorted out. When the door closed, Gentry looked at Shayne.

"It's not enough, Mike and you know it. Kellin's fancy lawyers might make hash out of a box of flowers."

"I know it," Shayne said. "That's why I want you to wait twenty-four hours before you even try to pick up Kellin."

Will Gentry frowned. "You have something in mind?"

"I have. Be in the park tomorrow when the Sox tangle with the Empires again. Lefty Llewellyn is pitching. Kellin will be there too. If I know him."

"What about Ben Arlington?" Gentry asked.

Mike Shayne got to his feet. "If I know Ben and I'm sure I do, I think it's about time he sent his report into the Commissioner. Maybe he did already."

It took Shayne less than fifteen minutes to get back to his office.

Lucy Hamilton was impatiently waiting for him. "Michael, where have you been? I've got a dozen messages for you."

"Name one," Shayne said tiredly, sitting on the corner of her desk.

Lucy frowned. "Arlington called again. The baseball man. Said he sent in some report to the Commissioner. Said you understand. You're to call him back."

Shayne smiled. "Good old Ben. I will. And the other calls?"

The frown widened on Lucy's smooth brow.

"Well, a man who wouldn't identify himself called and left a funny message. Said you'd understand that too. 'The sunrise is beautiful in Miami. It would be a shame to miss seeing it.' Is that a code or something, Michael?"

"Just a warning from a hood named Kellin. I stepped on his toes a little today. But he doesn't know that yet. What else, angel?"

Lucy sighed. "Tim Rourke called about five or six times. He thinks you're awfully palsy-walsy with a baseball manager all of a

(Please turn to Page 100)

Three SHAYNE *Stories*

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If you've just discovered our magazine you may not have read any of them. And if you are a real dyed-in-the-wool Shayne fan—and who isn't—you'll want to read them. We have a limited supply left and they are yours—by filling out the conveniently printed coupon.

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No. 1 . . . THE DEBT OF DEATH by Brett Halliday

A long-odd crime gamble in Miami may be much the same, percentage-wise, as it would be in New York or the Windy City. Except that —trapping killers in Miami was Michael Shayne's particular specialty.

No. 2 . . . BLOOD OF AN ORANGE by Brett Halliday

It was really hard for Mike Shayne to believe that an orange grove in the bright Florida sunlight could in any way be haunted by the dark specters of arson and murder. But the nightmare was real.

No. 3 . . . MURDER ON JUNGLE KEY by Brett Halliday

The murdered man had been a preacher with a rare gift of eloquence. It was hard to believe that death could have actually silenced his voice forever. So Mike listened . . . for Guilt's self-accusing whisper.

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sudden and he's wondering if there's a story in it."

"Smart newsman, Tim," Shayne said drily. He rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "I wonder if he's tumbled to this whole business. Arlington wouldn't have said anything to newspaper men. And Will Gentry was in the dark until this afternoon—" Suddenly, his face lit up in a huge smile. "Lucy, I've got it. The power of the press can be used in many ways, can't it?"

"Michael, what are you talking about?"

"Never mind," Shayne said. "You call Tim Rourke back. I'm in now and ready to talk to him. I'll take the call in my office."

He strode rapidly into the inner office. Lucy Hamilton spread her hands helplessly and reached for the telephone near her elbow. Once Michael Shayne made up his mind, there was just no point in contradicting him.

XI

LEFTY LLEWELLYN was warming up on the third base side of home plate. It was a warm Miami afternoon and the ballpark was filled with appreciative fans in gaily-colored sports clothes. News of Lefty's recovery from a stomach ache and resumption of mound duty had had an obvious effect on the gate. Customers were still pouring in when Shayne, coolly dressed for the afternoon in a tropical worsted suit, met Ben Arlington on the fields.

Ben Arlington was suited up already and looking grimmer than ever. "Mike," he gritted. "I'm waiting for the Commissioner's answer now. And Kellin and his goons are here already. Behind home plate. I'm worried."

"Forget it, Ben," the redhead smiled. "Your troubles are over."

Arlington grimaced. "Tell me how. Lefty won't go for Kellin's deal and that rat will hurt him if he can. I'm licked now. I sent my report to the Commissioner like I should have in the first place. But if Lefty gets killed, I'll only have myself to blame."

"No. You still have three swings, Ben. And I'll see that you get them."

"What do you mean?"

The redhead stood up. "Go talk to Lefty and leave it to me." He waved to Llewellyn who had spotted him. Lefty looked a trifle pallid but as strong as ever.

Shayne walked quickly to the seats behind home plate. He found Frankie Kellin sitting in style with Louie and an assorted group of goons in protective phalanx about the box.

Kellin looked up when he saw Shayne, an ugly smile creasing his dark face. "Well, shamus," he purred. "You got my message?"

Shayne stared him down.

"Just thought I'd be the first to

tell you that you struck out, Kellin. You're through here in Miami. You may be through all over." An angry rumble rolled around the seats.

Kellin didn't stop smiling. "That's your story. Beat it."

Shayne shook his head. "It's yours, Frankie. Not mine. Point A—Nona Fowler is in jail. The Miami Police Department has her sworn statement that she delivered flowers for you along with that little love letter to Lefty. It won't be hard to trace all the other letters, I imagine. How's that for a starter?"

Frankie Kellin tensed. "Go on. You got more."

Shayne smiled. "Nice crowd today. So big and so nice, it's being covered by the press, radio and television. Smile, Frankie. Tim Rourke has a camera on you from the broadcasting booth upstairs. You may not believe this but that ugly map of yours is on television."

"So?" Kellin's face was no longer happy.

Shayne shrugged. "So it's on the record you're here watching Lefty pitch for the Empires. You'll make all the local papers and national coverage. I arranged it that way. With the co-operation of the Miami police and the Miami gazettes. Anything happens to Lefty now, you haven't any alibi."

Kellin cursed. "What makes you think Lefty won't play ball with me?"

"He won't. Not for a million bucks would he throw one bad pitch. Watch him out there today.

Mike Shayne Leads Next Issue's Headliners with—

THE RESTLESS REDHEAD

In a gamble with Death it's hard to know in advance just how the dice will fall. So, as usual, Mike takes a chance on the unpredictable.

By BRETT HALLIDAY

You'll have your answer. You muffed this one, Frankie. Pick a smarter girl friend next time. But also—pick a good lawyer. You're going to need one. The Baseball Commissioner is going to investigate you."

Frank Kellin's face mottled. He rose from his seat in anger. The men with him moved. Out on the field, the umpires were going over the ground rules with the team captains. Fans behind Kellin's box started to yell angrily because their view of the proceedings was being obstructed.

"You'd better sit down, boys," Shayne said easily. "Before the fans take you apart. Besides, there's Will Gentry now. Coming to have a chat with all of you."

Shayne waved as the big figure of Gentry solidly flanked with police officers crossed over from the Empires dugout.

Kellin's men panicked. They began to scramble for the runway leading out of the park. Kellin shouted to keep them in check. Shayne dodged in front of them, holding up his hand in a mock gesture.

"Hold it. This is one introduction nobody is skipping."

Louie, on Kellin's right, cursed and clawed for his shoulder holster. Shayne stepped forward and slammed the .45 down on his wrist. Louie screamed in agony and fell against one of the other goons.

Around the box, silence reigned. The startled fans hushed, seeing Chief Will Gentry and his uniformed subordinates racing up the runway to Kellin's box.

"Mike," Gentry gasped, "you said no gunplay. You want to kill somebody?"

"No," Michael Shayne said. "I just want you to lock these hoods up so we can all watch a good, honest ball game."

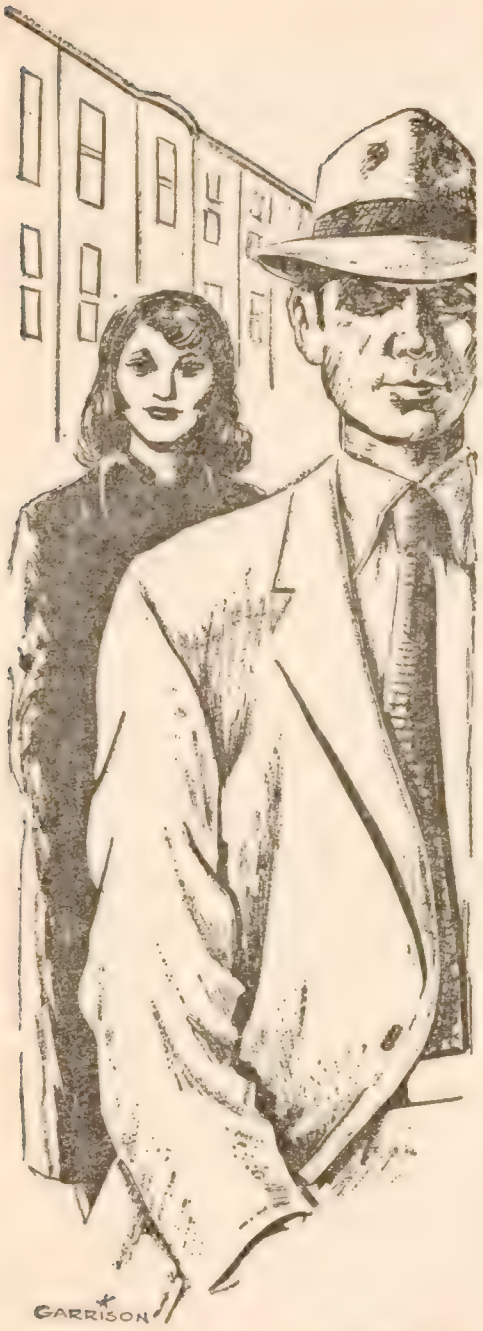
Will Gentry laughed grimly and motioned for his men to take in Kellin and his goons.

Down at the Empires dugout, Shayne could see Ben Arlington waving and hugging Lefty Joe Llewellyn. They looked proud and happy in the bright Florida sunlight.

It was time to *Play Ball* all right.

The right way.

MONDAY IS FOR TROUBLE



by RICHARD HARDWICK

Blackmail can be a two-prong racket . . . and very deadly.

IN LAKE STEVENS, Arthur Cannon was a man whose name was dropped with respect and pride. At forty-one, he had it made. Family man, pillar of society, president of the bank, mid-seventies golfer, in excellent health, and well-heeled.

It was on a Monday morning in October that Arthur Cannon's carefully built and balanced world began to crumble. The first stone cast came in the guise of a telephone call, which Cannon's secretary put through to him with some reluctance.

"The gentleman won't give his name, Mr. Cannon," she said. It did not make Elsie Jackson happy when Mondays began this way. Mondays should go smoothly, with no friction—a sort of cushion day to prepare for the rest of the week.

© 1962, by Richard Hardwick

"He says you'll want to talk to him because he's an old friend. What shall I tell him?"

Cannon hesitated a moment, then pushed away the report he had been reading. "Put him on, Elsie."

The telephone clicked as the circuits were changed. "Cannon?" a man's voice said. "Art Cannon?"

"This is Arthur Cannon."

There was a short pause during which Cannon thought he heard soft laughter. "It was just plain Art Cannon when I knew you. But we've aged, old buddy. We've all three aged."

"Who is this?" Cannon said.

"Let's check your memory, Art. A little word association. Pasadena . . .?"

"I'm a busy man," Cannon said quickly, but there was a difference in his voice. His mouth was suddenly dry and a cold heaviness, like some large indigestible thing, settled in the pit of his stomach. "I haven't time for games."

"Nineteen forty-four. That bring anything back? June fifteenth, to be exact."

"Shut up! You—"

Elsie Jackson looked up from her work and stared at him curiously for a moment through the glass panelled door. Her eyes showed her mild alarm at the prospect of a week beginning this way.

The voice at the opposite end of the wire said, "I knew you wouldn't forget your old friends, not a big man like you. I was thinking we ought to get together for old times' sake. Sort of hash over the good old days."

"What is it you want, Harry?" Cannon said tonelessly. "How did you find me?"

"Not on the phone, Art. Me and Irene are staying in a joint called the Shady Rest Motel. It's north of town on Route Seventeen. Cabin Twelve. Be here at six. Oh, and Art, bring along a bottle of that real good bourbon you used to like so much."

"We've got nothing to talk about. All that's past."

"Past, but not forgotten. Me and Irene want to talk and I think you'll find it interesting. Six o'clock, Art. Six o'clock sharp."

Arthur Cannon slowly lowered the telephone. A seventeen-year-old, meticulously constructed foundation had slipped beneath him in those few minutes, its false underpinnings exposed, staggering him. It couldn't crop up now. Not after all this time had passed.

He flipped the switch on the intercom. "Elsie . . . I don't want to be disturbed for a while."

"Mr. Parks just came in. He had an appointment with you."

"Tell Frank to talk to him."

"But you've always handled all his busi—"

"Damn it! I said I didn't want to be disturbed! Wasn't that clear enough?"

He could hear her tiny gasp.

He'd never spoken to her that way before, and he regretted it immediately. He heard the subdued, "Yes sir, Mr. Cannon," and he cursed inwardly, flipped the switch off and rose slowly from his desk.

He walked across the large, tastefully-appointed office and idly picked up the trophy he had won in last year's club tournament. Why? *Why!* They still put erasers on one end of a pencil. Everybody made mistakes. Arthur Cannon had made his in nineteen forty-four a continent's width from Lake Stevens. He was twenty-four years old, and had been classified in 4-F in the draft because of a back injury sustained in high school football.

But Cannon was big and healthy-looking as a horse, and he grew tired of enduring the cold stares of those who saw him and wondered what strings he must have pulled to avoid military service.

He left Lake Stevens and went across the country to California, where he got a job in an aircraft plant near Pasadena. He couldn't recall exactly where or when he met Harry and Irene Stembler, and years later, looking back on it, Cannon invariably marvelled at the unlikeliness of Harry annd Irene as companions—people totally different from him, and with backgrounds which had seemed, even then, as strange and obscure as that of a Fiji islander.

Perhaps it was this very disparity that had attracted Cannon to the couple at that particular time, a time when he felt resentment toward his own kind of people. But whatever the reason, the three of them became constant companions.

It was Harry Stembler who—one night in his and Irene's flat—broached the subject.

"How'd you like to make a little extra dough this week, Art?"

"Extra dough? How?

Harry glanced at Irene. She poured another drink into her glass and nodded her head. "Sure, go ahead Harry. Art's a very good friend."

Stembler went to the bottle and replenished his own drink. "Me and Irene are putting dough aside for a special reason, Art. I never told you this before, but we got an aim. It might sound screwey to you, but when this war is over we're going to get us a little fishing camp back in the Blue Ridge mountains."

Cannon turned and looked inquiringly at Irene. She had out her compact and was busily applying lipstick to her full lips. Irene, who always seemed to be putting on lipstick or powder or combing her hair, didn't seem the fishing-camp type.

Stembler went on. "You can't save the kind of dough we need out of what the plant pays. So, we got us a sideline. And this time, Art,

because you're our pal, we want to cut you in."

"A sideline?"

Stembler nodded. "Did you ever stop to think how much dough there is in the till of a liquor store? And with damn near every able-bodied man either in the army or working in a defense plant, there's just a bunch of old geeks left to tend the store."

"You mean—robbery?"

"That's a word for it, honey," Irene said. She clamped her compact shut, and dropped it and her lipstick into her pocketbook.

"All you got to do is drive the car, Art," Stembler said. "Leave the rest to me and Irene. You get a third of the take. Come on, what do you say? How about it, Art?"

Stembler picked up the bottle of whiskey and poured a generous shot into Cannon's empty glass.

Through the same crazy logic that had run his life since leaving Lake Stevens, Cannon found himself the next day, in a stolen car, parked before a well-stocked liquor store in Los Angeles. But something went wrong. Harry and Irene went into the store, waited until there were no other customers and held up the clerk.

Instead of obeying their orders —which would have been the intelligent thing to do, since he merely worked there—the clerk went for a gun under the counter. Harry shot him, once, a nice round little hole just over his left eye.

Leaving the scene, there had first been panic in the car, then bitter accusations and recriminations. They ditched the car in a suburb after carefully wiping it to make sure that all fingerprints would be erased.

Arthur Cannon quit his job the next day and rode a day coach back across the country to Lake Stevens. Several months passed before he was able to sleep an entire night through.

The years piled up. Arthur Cannon married well and worked hard and gradually the past—and the mistake—were buried under a solid mountain of success.

Until the day Harry Stembler phoned.

The Shady Rest Motel lay in an L-shape bordering an oyster-shell paved drive and parking area. A rough hand-painted sign listed single, double, and twin rates. A trailer park adjoined the motel, and in the windows of the filling station, which was also part of the establishment, were several neon beer advertisements.

Cannon had taken the bank car, a black, inconspicuous sedan. He turned off the highway after a totally irrelevant and guilty glance in the rear-view mirror. Cabin 12 stood at one end of the L, the numerals tacked in plastic letters above the door. There was a car parked before the cabin, an aged, dusty Mercury with Georgia plates.

He pulled up beside it, got out and went to the door. He had lifted his hand to knock when the door swung inward. The blinds were drawn and the room was in semi-darkness.

"Come on in, Art! Come on in!" a familiar voice said.

Cannon looked at the face that emerged into the light. Harry Stembler looked remarkably as he had seventeen years ago, the same ferret face, the hairline perhaps back a little further than it had been, but the hair as the same dusty blond color. He wore a soiled white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, exposing his bony arms.

"You bring the booze?"

"This isn't a social call, Harry. Say what's on your mind and clear out of here." Cannon stepped into the dark room. "And let me tell you one thing before you start. If you've come here with some notion of trying to blackmail me, you can forget it. There'd be only your word against mine."

"And your word carries weight around here, Art." The voice came from across the semi-darkness of the room.

Cannon immediately recognized it as Irene's. He turned and flipped the light switch beside the door.

Irene sat on the edge of the double bed. The years had betrayed Irene. The body that had once been so lush and firm had now gone to a puffy matronly stoutness. Her face, despite its plumpness,

was sallow and even in the artificial light Cannon could see a meshwork of tiny wrinkles at the corners of her eyes.

"That's right, Irene,'" he said. "My word carries a good deal of weight around here."

She crossed her legs. "Let's see, you're president of the local bank, a big wheel in the chamber of commerce and Rotary, you play golf every Thursday and Sunday, and you've got a wife named Carolyn and two kids."

"You left out the fact that I'm chairman of the town council and

as such have some influence over police affairs here."

"Better show him, Harry," Irene said. "We won't get anything but lip out of him this way."

"Sit down, Art!"

Cannon came to stand in the center of the small room. "Maybe I accepted your—invitation with too much haste. Speak your piece and I'll go."

The faint, vaguely truckling smile vanished from Stembler's face. "I said sit down, Art. What I'm going to show you will change your mind, I'm sure of that."

Cannon stared at the suddenly serious face, then turned toward Irene. She had her compact out, and was looking into the little round mirror as she applied her lipstick. It took Cannon back to those days in Pasadena. Irene was constantly smearing on that dark red lipstick, whenever a mirror caught her eye. The lips that had been full then were now thin and austere, but she applied the coloring to an area around them as well, in an effort to give them the illusion of fullness and youth.

Cannon sat down on a straight-backed chair and waited for Stembler to go on.

"Well, it's this," Stembler said. He opened a suitcase and took out a folded copy of a newspaper and handed it to Cannon. "Look at the date on the paper, and the name on it."

It was a copy of the *Los Angeles Times*. The date on the masthead was *June 16, 1944*.

"Turn to the second page, the third column," Stembler said, his voice rasping a little.

Cannon opened the paper, found the column. The heading read: CLERK KILLED IN LIQUOR STORE ROBBERY.

"Read down a ways," Stembler said, "I underlined the part I wanted you to pay particular attention to."

Cannon found the underlined section, and read, half-aloud: "Police say the stolen car was located in a suburban area, some eight miles from the scene of the crime. The fleeing bandits had wiped it clean of fingerprints with the exception of an almost perfect set found on the rearview mirror. The prints did not match those of the car's owner and are therefore assumed to be those of one of the bandits."

"Get it, Art? You were the driver. Those are *your* prints they got on file out there in L.A."

Cannon re-read the newspaper article slowly, then looked up. "How did you find me? Why did you look for me after all this time?"

"You told us all about this town. You were just running back there in 'forty-four. A homesick kid, running from something. I figured all along you were the kind that would go home and make good, Art. I knew you had what it takes."

"So you are going to try blackmail."

Irene shrugged. "We got to eat."

"Why don't you try working," Cannon said bitterly.

"Come down out of the pulpit, buster!" the woman snapped. "You weren't so high and mighty the last time I saw you. You weren't a damned thing but a scared pup with your tail between your legs. You couldn't get far enough from L.A., and you couldn't do it fast enough."

Cannon squeezed his hands together. "How much?"

"That's more like it!" Stembler said. "Now, you two sit right here and I'll run down to the liquor store and get us a bottle. Let me hold ten bucks, Art."

"Just tell me what the bite is."

"We want to have a drink with you," Irene said. "It ain't often that Harry and me get a chance to mingle with the upper crust."

"She means it, Art," Stembler said. "Irene's got her heart set on having a couple of drinks with you."

Cannon wearily took out his billfold and handed Stembler a ten dollar bill. Harry went out and Cannon heard the Mercury start and back around, crunching across the shell surface.

"Want to know what me and Harry been doing all this time?" Irene said.

"Not particularly."

"Nice of you to be so interested. We did just what we told you we were going to do. We got enough money together and we bought a little fishing camp on a lake in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We had better than fifty grand stashed away after that last job in Los Angeles, and we used every dime of it keeping that camp going. I'll have to say this for Harry as a businessman. It took him a long time to go broke, but he finally made it."

"So then you thought of your old pal. Very touching."

"Don't hand me a sob story about how hard you've worked for what you got! I happen to know you married money."

Cannon turned away. Through the slit of the Venetian blinds he saw the Mercury coming back around the drive in front of the motel. It glided down the slope in a small flurry of white dust and stopped in front of the room. Stembler came in with a fifth of rye.

"Get some glasses, Irene. There's some in the bathroom."

Stembler went back out to the car and brought in a plastic bucket of ice. Irene cracked the seal and poured whisky over ice in the three thick tumblers.

"To us," Stembler said. "The old three musketeers."

"Fingerprints in the sands of time," Irene said and hoisted her glass.

Cannon drank his at a gulp. He picked up the bottle and poured another.

"That's the way, boy! Just like old times!" said Harry Stembler. "No hard feelings, huh? Live and let live?"

"You still haven't said how much you want."

Stembler put his glass down. "It's this way, Art. Me and Irene had a siege of bad luck. A hell of a run of it. We lost everything we had. I figure the way prices have gone up and—well, me and Irene ain't getting any younger, either. We could get off to a new start and you'd never hear from us again. I know I can make it this time." The pink tip of his tongue came out and touched his lips. "It'd take a hundred grand, Art—"

"A hundred thousand!" Cannon said. "You must be out of your mind! Both of you!"

"I don't like your attitude! Stembler said, his voice rising slightly. He waggled a finger under Cannon's nose. "I tried to be as—well, as civilized as possible about this thing. It ain't nothing personal, you ought to see that. If we were just looking to shake you down we would have come to you a long time ago. You were a pal, Art. We liked you. We still like you. It's just that we need the dough, and you got it. A hundred grand ain't going to put too big a crimp in the way you live. But we need it!"

"I'll give you ten thousand. Take it or leave it, friend."

Stembler glanced toward Irene, then shrugged. "We'll just have to leave it. It wouldn't be enough."

Irene put her glass down beside the others on the dresser. She crossed her arms over the now matronly bosom. "People around here are talkative, Art. We found out a good deal about you before we got in touch."

"So I've noticed."

"More than the general stuff. For instance, we know you and your wife own controlling interest in that bank. You've got rental property, you've got a piece of an automobile agency, not to mention what you've got socked away in stock and bonds and cash."

"If that's your last word, Art," Stembler put in, "then we won't waste any more of your valuable time. You'll be wanting to spend the short time that's left with your family and friends."

"That's left?" Cannon said.

"A threat ain't worth making if you don't intend carrying it out, Art. There'll be a letter going to the L.A. police, if we don't get our hundred grand."

"I've . . . I've got to have time. I'll have to think it over."

Irene smiled and lifted her lipstick toward her mouth.

"What's to think over?" she said. "You either cough up or you don't. That's simple enough, ain't it?"

"How do I know you won't be back in a month, wanting more?"

"You don't know. But we waited all this time. We went broke the hard way. Working. We

did that and then some before we decided this was the only way. And when we decided on it, and found out how you stood, we agreed that it would have to be whole hog or nothing. That's the way it is, Art. That's the way it has to be."

Cannon poured more of the whiskey into his tumbler, noticing that his hand was shaking. "I have to make arrangements. I don't keep that much cash lying idle. It'll take time."

"Sure!" Stembler said. "Take your time, Art. Me and Irene can sit right here and keep out of sight till you're ready."

"Just remember," Irene said. "That's a firm price. It don't mean ninety-nine thousand."

"I understand," Cannon said. He turned his glass up and swallowed the contents.

He turned and went out into the late afternoon sunlight of a day that had become vastly unreal.

"CHARLIE," Arthur Cannon said on the telephone the next morning to the editor of the local newspaper, the *Lake Stevens Gazette*. "How would you go about getting a copy of a newspaper published some years back, in another city?"

"What city, Art?"

"Well, for example, say—say Los Angeles."

"They'd probably have back copies on file in any big municipal library. Contact a library and tell 'em you'd like a photostat of the particular issue. Be glad to do it for you."

"No . . . no thanks. It's not that important. Thanks for the information."

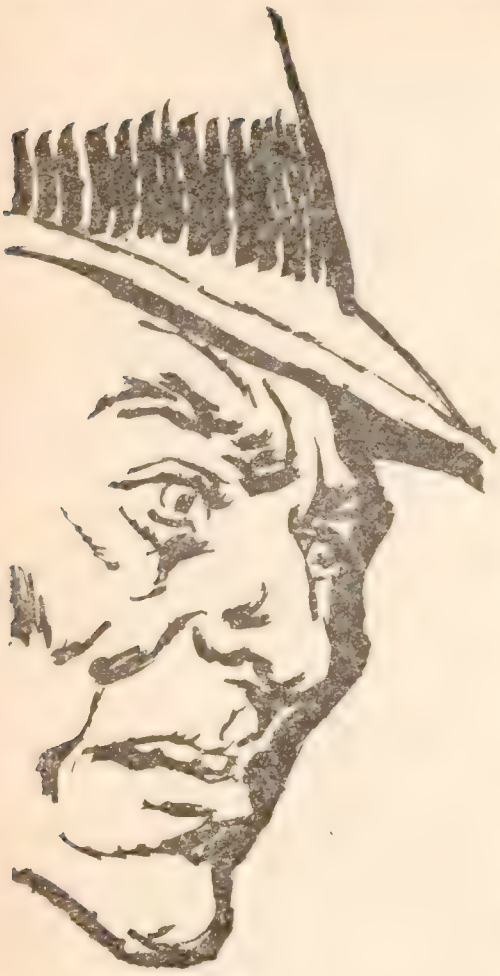
"Don't mention it, and don't forget the poker game at Ed's tomorrow night."

"I won't. Goodbye, Charlie."

Cannon hung up the telephone. They might take him, but they wouldn't take him as a fool. Lying in bed the night before, listening to Carolyn's regular breathing there beside him, it had occurred to Cannon that Harry and Irene could have gotten that paper made up especially for this shakedown, that no such article had ever appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. If they'd had it all along, surely they would have sought him out sooner.

But maybe they had. Maybe it was before he had made enough to make it really worth their while to put the bite on. Or maybe Harry had been telling the truth. Maybe they really hadn't wanted to do this to him before they had gone broke. If the paper was genuine, if his fingerprints had been found on the rear view mirror of the stolen car, they had kept the information in reserve for just such an occurrence.

Cannon did not contact Harry and Irene that day. He phoned the municipal library in Atlanta,



found that they did have the back issues of the *Los Angeles Times,* and he had them air-mail photostats to him. The photostats arrived the following day. Cannon intercepted the manila folder on Elsie Jackson's desk and took it straight into his office.

The paper Stembler had shown him had been genuine. The article was there, exactly as he had read it two days before. Harry and Irene were pulling no bluff. He folded the copy, put it back in the envelope, and slipped it into the center drawer of his desk.

There was nothing to do now but get the money up. For the next week Cannon—as quietly and unobtrusively as possible—sold some of his holdings. He hinted cryptically to his stockbroker that he needed the cash for a project he was contemplating. A real estate office had long had a buyer waiting for a particular piece of downtown real estate which Cannon happened to own, and he let that go immediately.

By Thursday, only eleven days after he had received the telephone call from Harry Stembler, Arthur Cannon had the full sum in cash and in bills no larger than hundreds, as Stembler had designated.

When Elsie Jackson took her lunch hour, Cannon phoned the Shady Rest Motel.

It was Friday morning. The payoff had taken place without fuss or incident the night before at Harry and Irene's motel room. It was over—until the next time.

Cannon looked up from his morning coffee. "How'd you like to take a few days off, honey? Go down to Miami Beach and really take it easy for the weekend."

Carolyn Cannon looked at him strangely. "Are you feeling all right, Arthur?"

"I'm feeling tired. Tired of the bank and tired of Lake Stevens."

"And tired of me?"

"You know better than that. We could leave the kids with your mother, I'll call Elsie and Frank and turn the damned bank over to them for today. I'll only miss one day at the office."

"I think you mean it," his wife said with a smile. "Yes, you *do* mean it. Is this a new Arthur Cannon? An impulsive Arthur Cannon."

He rose quickly and finished his coffee. "Start packing. I'll get Elsie on the phone and then you can call your mother."

Monday morning Arthur Cannon was back at his desk in the bank. Homer Walton, chief of police of Lake Stevens, had been ushered in by Elsie. He lowered his bulk into the chair beside Cannon's desk and placed a suitcase between his feet.

"Guess you heard about our little mystery while you and the wife were down in Miami?"

"No. We got in late last night," Cannon said. He pushed a humidor across the desk and Chief Walton picked out a cigar, sniffed it appreciatively, and accepted Cannon's light.

"Real strange thing," Walton said, puffing on the cigar. "People were staying out at the Shady Rest Motel, north on Route Seventeen. Been there for several days, according to Ed Nally, who owns the place. Anyhow, they paid up one morning. Matter of fact, it was

Friday morning, the same day you all left for Miami. They got as far as the junction of State Fifty-five. Seems like they were trying to pass another car and they smashed head-on into one of them big refrigerator rigs. Smashed 'em flatter'n a pancake."

"They were . . . killed?" Cannon managed.

"Never knew what hit 'em. But

that ain't the mystery. There was this old suitcase in the car. Now get this, the car's an old beat up model, there's nothing at all to make you think this ain't just another statistic. Except when we opened the suitcase."

Chief Walton took a deep drag on his cigar. "There was a hundred thousand dollars in the suitcase. One hundred thousand!

"Naturally, that starts us checking. In the rest of the luggage we found something sent us off on the trail. There was an old newspaper, a *Los Angeles Times,* dating back to 'forty-four. On one page there was an article that was marked in pencil, a story about a liquor store holdup in Los Angeles. Clerk was shot and killed. So, right away I contact the L. A. police and find out the case is still unsolved. All they got is a set of fingerprints. No witnesses, nothing else."

"Was there . . . was there anything else in the luggage along with the newspaper?"

"Only the usual stuff you'd find in a suitcase. Anyhow, on a hunch I had the L. A. police airmail me a photostat of these fingerprints. We checked 'em against the prints of the two folks killed in the wreck, and sure enough, we hit pay dirt."

"You mean they—they matched?"

"The woman's left hand. Complete set. You know the way women turn a mirror around to put on their lipstick? Well, it looks like that's what happened. These two pulled the job, the guy doing the driving."

"The woman's . . . prints," Cannon mumbled.

"The car they used was stolen and when they abandonned it they tried to wipe it clean of prints. But they overlooked the rearview mirror and that's where these prints were lifted. So, it looks like little old Lake Stevens has solved one for Los Angeles."

Chief Walton hauled himself up from the chair and lifted the suitcase onto Cannon's desk.

"Now here's where we got our mystery." He opened the suitcase. The bills were stacked row on row, each packet of bills wrapped in an unidentifiable rubber band. "I got to thinking, and I'd just as soon not leave this much cash lying in the safe over at the office. Figured the bank would be the best place for it while we work on the case."

He took another drag from his cigar, laid the cigar in the ashtray on the desk, and looked across at Cannon. "What do you say me and you count it together, Art, then you can give me a receipt for it."

Chief Walton began to take the stacks out of the suitcase, and then slowly, licking his broad thumb from time to time, he counted out the packets and passed them over to Arthur Cannon for his confirmation.

A college professor who tangles with a hit-run killer and a vicious police cover-up . . . has need of exceptional courage.

by PIERRE AUDEMARS

EFFECT AND CAUSE

THERE WERE THOSE who maintained that the status of Professor of Philosophy at Cranborough University, however eminent, was hardly the best qualification for raising a fifteen-year-old son. But after the death of his wife Robert Hart ignored all of those well-intentioned pessimists and proceeded to make a very good job of it. Which was his way with most of the jobs he tackled.

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And yet sometimes he wondered whether the pessimists had not been right and he, in his single-mindedness, and devotion, had not been wrong.

"Why don't you step on it, dad?" the lad asked.

"Look, chum—we're doing fifty."

"That's nothing. Let her out. See what we can do if we really try."

"Ed, try to understand," Hart pleaded. "Fifty is quite a reasonable speed. Keep it up and you've covered some mileage in a day. Besides, at this speed I've still got control of the car. And we're in no hurry. Remember, this is a camping trip, not a road race. High speed is dangerous. If something happens—if some emergency crops up—you've had it."

These are just words, he thought even as he said them. Why not tell his son the truth? Why not tell him about the image of Marcia, crumpled and bloody and torn, lying in the roadway—the image that still had the power to rob him of his very manhood?

Then he remembered his friend Wyeth Stanford—Wyeth the scientist, Wyeth the engineer, Wyeth the realist. "A fifteen year old," Wyeth had said, "is not interested in first causes or logical premises. A fifteen year old wants action. Are you going to be able to give it to him, Rob?"

Out of the corner of his eye he glanced at his son. Ed was frowning at the clear road ahead.

"I know all that—but I like to go fast. Why didn't you buy a Jag or an Alfa?"

"Too much money, son. Besides, this one will do over a hundred, and that's fast enough for me. Wyeth hardly used it. He had the engine on his bench most week-ends tuning it."

"Come on, then. Le's see what he rates as a tuner."

Robert laughed and gave up. The sewing-machine hum of the huge straight-eight Lycoming sang into a snarling roar as he trod on the gas. The road was clear and straight—seventy, eighty, eighty-five, ninety. Ed sat in a frozen ecstasy as the trees and fields surged up and streamed past on either side of the flowing tarmac.

But as they slowed for the bend Robert could hear the heavy thump of his heart, even as he felt the flying breeze, cold and damp, on the moisture that beaded his brow.

THE PICNIC WAS an unqualified success. High on the Sierra Madriga, above where the road swept around the bluff of the cliff, they found an overgrown gully, split with the cleft of a miniature waterfall, and there they made their fire.

Where the road had been engineered out of the shoulder of the mountain, and enough space had

been gained for a small and narrow parking place right on the edge, protected by an iron rail.

They parked the car and admired the view. Then they took the picnic basket and climbed to the gully above. Robert came back with an old tin and drained gasoline from the tank. He mixed the gasoline with sand and showed Ed how they had kept warm in Korea.

Then they found a clump of bushes whose branches were springy enough for bows. With a clasp-knife and twine they soon were armed and equipped and the gully made an ideal place for ambush.

Robert was too busy to think of Wyeth. If he remembered him at all, it was only with scorn, that a man could be so wrong about what a boy would be interested in.

Finally, exhausted, they came back to the rug. Robert filled and lit his pipe and Ed made for the coke bottle he had buried by the spring.

Below them they could see the road. A battered pick-up with a load of barrels had drawn up on the far side of the parking-place. A man and a girl leaned over the iron rail, their shoulders touching, admiring the view.

Robert puffed at his pipe, watching the smoke drift lazily upwards in the clear windless air. From the high side he heard the roar of a powerful engine, driven at a high speed, growing rapidly louder and nearer.

He felt quiet and relaxed, and the vivid brightness of the sun invested the scene before him with a strangely strengthened and emphasized quality, as if he were seeing a projection of reality, an image whose outlines and planes were too sharp, too bright, too clear.

The noise of the speeding car struck an alien note and disturbed him, so that he raised himself on one elbow in order to be able to see it when it came into view.

And then, quite suddenly, several things seemed to happen at once.

The girl left her companion at the rail and walked back slowly and idly past the pick-up, towards the road. The roar became a crescendo of sound as the car, a huge blue Cadillac, swept and rocked around the corner.

The girl jumped in panic, dashed two steps the wrong way and then stood frozen with horror.

The man yelled and left the rail with a bound. Tires screamed and the huge car rocked into a skid. The girl was flung like a rag doll. The car just seemed to touch the back of the pick-up, gently, almost caressingly, but the side crumpled like cardboard and two of the barrels crashed down into the road.

Then the car righted itself with spinning wheels, lurched, swayed

and roared off without a pause.

Finally there was the diminishing roar of the engine, dying as if consumed in the bright hot glare of the sun and the white fierce light of the afternoon, and there was the thick black oil from the smashed open barrels spreading widely and slowly, sluggishly and sullenly, over the crushed pebble flints of the road.

Robert could see that the girl was dead. He had no recollection of running there, of pausing, of waiting wordlessly, respectfully, while the man cradled the limp figure tenderly in his arms.

All this he could not remember. But the image of her flung body was still clear in his mind. He knew she would be dead. Marcia had looked like that and Marcia was dead.

He felt Ed's hand in his own, groping timidly for re-assurance, and gripped it suddenly and warmly. But he did not move. Ed caught the need for silence from the tenseness of his figure and waited beside him, wide-eyed and wondering.

Then the man looked up, his face a ravaged mask. "Did you see them?"

"Yes. But not the number," Robert said.

The man reached into his belt and pulled out a gun. The girl's head hung, dreadfully, until he replaced his arm. His hand moved.

"Here—take it. There were four of them. You may need it. You will have to shift."

Robert leaned forward and took the gun. Then he gestured with his other hand.

"What about a doctor?" Hart asked.

The man shook his head. A tear glistened and softened mercifully the bleak hardness of his eyes.

"Too late. Afterwards—maybe. I'll stay with her. Don't waste time."

Suddenly, as if a spring had uncoiled, the spell was broken and Robert dashed for his car. He had the motor running and the gear in reverse before Ed slammed the other door, and then with a lurch and a roar they were away.

Afterwards, for many a long month, Ed used to boast to his classmates about that drive. Words could never be adequate to describe it—super-dodgems and heaven stuck on the front of a giant racer was the nearest he ever came to being articulate, but the memory remained for ever.

Down they swooped at a nightmare speed, down in the wide sweeping curves and hairpin bends which brought the road eight thousand feet from the Sierras to the dusty plain, down in a series of giant switchback loops, down at a speed that eased miraculously at each bend and curve, down at a rate that brought Ed's stomach to his mouth and choked the breath in his throat.

Once he glanced at his father. Robert was sitting easily, a little to one side of the seat, and yet his ease had all the tension of a coiled spring. His hands were light and sure on the wheel and yet they clenched with sudden and savage strength at the bends.

"Dad—"

"Yes, son?"

"If we keep this up we could be in Alaska by tonight."

"Don't worry. I don't intend to keep it up that long."

Robert looked ahead—always ahead. If he saw, far in front, the dust cloud that was the Cadillac, he gave no sign. His mouth was hard and bitter as he remembered Marcia. This had happened before, and his whole life had changed. This had happened before, and the deed had gone unpunished, because no one had seen and no one had heard and no one had witnessed.

It must not happen again, if only for her sake.

The Cadillac was the faster car, but Robert knew that after what had happened and whatever the urgency, even the most callous driver would be bound to take it a little easier. Besides, the road was difficult. It was not a question of what a car would do, but what nerve its driver had to take the bends.

He was not surprised when he saw the dust ahead, and his foot flattened the gas pedal in a swift and savage thrust that sent the car roaring through the stunted mesquite bushes like a bullet from a gun.

"Dad—"

"Well?"

"Have you got control?"

Robert grinned. It was nice when they remembered, even if it was only to pull your leg.

"No. Scared?"

"Yes, a little. I bet that Caddy hasn't got control either."

"That makes two of us. Hold tight."

Across the plain the Cadillac held its own. But after a few miles the blue foothills loomed up, the last barrier before the sea, and the road twisted and climbed and looped and curved as it mounted ever higher to their summit.

Robert flung the car uphill on indirect gear at an unlawful speed. His shirt was drenched with perspiration and the deep lines on his face glistened even in the shadow of the trees with the continual effort of wrenching the wheel.

But always, steadily and surely, he gained, until as they reached the summit and broke out from the gloom into the bright sunshine, he was close enough to read the license plate.

"Got a pencil, Ed?"

"Sure."

"Good. And your notebook. Write this down very carefully." He read off the number—CF479-324. "Got that?" he asked.

"Yup."

"How many times have I told you it's *yes,* not *yup?* Never mind. Read it back."

The boy complied.

"Correct," Hart said.

"Dad—"

"Yes?"

"What if an emergency crops up?"

Again Robert lost some of his tension as he grinned.

"It has, chum. We're right in the middle of it."

Before and below them lay the wide sweep of the bay, with the blue Pacific rollers creaming into surf as they surged over the flat golden sands. The roofs and houses of Bayshore clustered all down the hillside until they merged and mingled into the town and the harbor.

The whole scene slept in the tranquil sunlit air as if limned in translucent golden light and the sun flashed a myriad points of fire from the sapphire sea and the fire streamed back in a path of gold to that lowering sun in a burning sky.

Robert eased up.

The Cadillac drew away. His glance at the license plate had confirmed that there were four men inside. It would be better to do this legally, especially as he was not alone.

Half-way down the hill the Cadillac turned into a drive flanked by beautifully carved Spanish iron gates.

Robert drove past easily, rolling the car downhill. A small lodge slept deserted in the sun. There was no name by the gates and no house visible through the trees that bordered the driveway.

And so, quietly and perhaps a little sadly, like the aftermath of desire, they came into Bayshore.

THE BUILDING was high and imposing and of an ornamental white stone. Robert parked the car neatly between the white lines in the driveway and told Ed to wait outside.

"I don't know how long I shall be," he said. "Go and buy yourself an ice cream cone or something. Then come back to the car and wait for me here."

"Okay, dad."

Inside there was an impersonal coolness—the chill of green lino and steel filing cabinets, fluorescent lighting and air-conditioning. The atmosphere was one of cold efficiency.

On the second floor a burly Sergeant in shirtsleeves asked him to wait. Robert sat on a very comfortable chair and eased his damp shirt away from his skin. He wondered whether he should make an effort to relax or if he ought to go on thinking about it.

"Captain Hunziger will see you now, sir."

"Thank you."

The Sergeant held open the low gate and preceded him down a

corridor, where he knocked on one of the doors.

"A Mr. Hart to see you, sir."

The Captain was sitting behind a desk. He stood up as Robert entered and held out his hand.

"Welcome to Bayshore, Mr. Hart. What can we do for you?"

Robert studied him for a moment before answering. Captain Hunziger was a compact, stockily built man, immaculate and cool in a well-pressed summer uniform. His complexion was swarthy and his eyes, in singular contrast, light grey and clear.

Robert looked down at his dusty shoes and suddenly felt very conscious of his own disheveled appearance. Then he squared his shoulders, walked across to the desk and shook the police officer's hand.

"Thank you," he replied. "I hope you will be able to help me, Captain. Please sit down and I'll tell you what happened."

The Captain resumed his seat and waved Robert to a chair. For a moment Robert closed his eyes, marshalling his thoughts. Then he opened them and fixed his stare, dark and intense, on the man behind the desk.

"These are the facts," he began quietly. "I'm on a camping trip with my son. This afternoon on the Sierra Madriga—where the road goes around the bluff of the cliff—we witnessed a particularly brutal case of hit and run. A girl was killed by a car being driven down hill at a dangerous speed.

"I chased them—there were four men in the car—and got near enough to read the license number. The car turned into one of the residential drives on the hill here and I want you to trace the owner and see that the driver is prosecuted."

The Captain's hand had been busy during this recital with a pencil and pad. His dark head was bent, absorbed in his task.

Now, suddenly, he looked up.

"Right. Your directness has been helpful. Now—a few questions, please."

His manner was brisk and impersonal. "Your full name, occupation and address."

"Robert Ellis Hart. Professor of Philosophy. Cranborough University. I live there."

"The number of this car you say you took."

Robert fished the leaf of Ed's notebook from the breast pocket of his shirt.

He read off the license number.

"Description."

"Cadillac, nineteen sixty model. Royal blue. Limousine. White tires."

Captain Hunziger laid down his pencil and leaned back in his chair. Subtly and imperceptibly, without Robert knowing how or why, his manner seemed indefinably to change.

"Now, Mr. Hart, you say you

chased this car and got close enough to read the license plate?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then why didn't you do something about this matter there and then?"

Robert felt a sudden swift surge of anger at the man's tone, but with an effort he mastered it. There would be no point in losing his temper. He had a job to do.

"As I told you before, Captain, there were four men in the car, and I had my young boy with me."

"And yet you carry a gun?"

Again Robert fought to control himself.

"The gun was given to me by the companion of the girl who was murdered."

"Not murdered, Mr. Hart. Killed in an accident."

"I prefer to call it murder. I happened to have witnessed it."

"Have you a permit to carry a gun?"

"Obviously not—since I have never had one before this afternoon. May I suggest that we are straying a little from the point at issue, Captain?"

For a moment their glances met and held—the light baffling stare, hard and antagonistic, and the dark intense gaze, sombre with the fire of all the memories that tragic incident had re-kindled—and it was the Captain's eyes that dropped first.

"Wait here a moment, Mr. Hart, if you please," he said. Then he got up in one swift movement and left the room, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Robert waited patiently, trying to keep his mind a blank.

He did not like the direction speculation led him. It would be better to stick to facts. He had reported a hit-and-run accident to the Bayshore Police, and Captain Hunziger had questioned him, inscribed notes and then left the room presumably to make inquiries. That was all there was to it. Anything else could probably be attributed to reaction, shock, overstrained nerves and a vivid imagination.

The door opened and Captain Hunziger came back into the room. Under one arm he held a bulky file. He did not walk to his desk but stood in the middle of the floor, hesitating.

Slowly Robert came to his feet. As the Captain still hesitated, he felt impelled to speak.

"Well?"

"I am afraid there has been some mistake, Mr. Hart—"

"Indeed?"

Now all the anger had left him. Now he was clear and cold and master of himself. Now, suddenly and swiftly, he could see the pattern of this man's mind—for all its efficiency and all its capability and all its authority—and the pattern seemed a familiar one.

It was the same as in his classes, where he took the eager minds of

the young and led them, gently and slowly and patiently, down the appointed paths of logic and premise and deduction and where he waited for them at each stumbling block, knowing how they would hesitate and why, ready and eager and willing to help them, to guide them, to instruct them . . .

And for that he had to be one move ahead, always—one move and sometimes two ahead of the keenest and quickest minds in the class.

"Yes. I can only suggest that in the heat of what must have been a very dangerous and a very fast drive—I know that road well—you made a mistake in reading the number."

Robert shook his head. "I made no mistake. I checked it twice."

The Captain continued as if Hart had not spoken.

"We have a blue Cadillac of that description and with the number you gave on our files, but it belongs to Mr. Van Horn, who is one of our most prominent citizens. I immediately telephoned him from the other office to check, and he assures me that he has not left his house this afternoon."

For a long moment there was silence. Then Robert spoke, slowly and heavily.

"Does your Mr. Van Horn live half-way down the hill, with Spanish iron ornamental gates on his drive?"

"Yes, he does. But there are a half-dozen estates in that square mile. Most of them have that type of gate."

"I see."

Again there was a silence. Then Robert tried again. "There should be some evidence on the front

wing and fender, Captain. You would not care to drive up with me and check?"

The Captain shook his head, his features impassive.

"I am afraid that would only be a waste of time, Mr. Hart. I have no reason to doubt Mr. Van Horn's word."

"And yet you have no hesitation in doubting mine."

"Not at all. An easily understandable and excusable mistake. Your zeal does you credit, Mr. Hart."

Again they stared at each other and again it was the Captain who could not meet the murderous rage in Robert's eyes.

"I would not advise you to sneer, Captain Hunziger," he said quietly, and the other man flinched at what lay under the softly, savagely spoken words. "Who is your superior officer?"

"I am directly responsible to the State Commissioner, Mr. Hart."

"Can I get in touch with him?"

"I am afraid not. He is away on a fishing trip. I am in charge and with complete authority until his return."

"I see." There was cold anger in Robert's eyes.

The silence lengthened between them until Captain Hunziger seemed to grow restive. He walked to the window and stood there, looking down into the forecourt. Then he spoke casually, without turning round.

"What are your plans, Mr. Hart?"

Robert eyed him contemptuously. "Why—are you getting scared? Worried about your badge?"

A flush crept up to the swarthy brow at the icy contempt in Robert's voice. But the Captain controlled himself with an effort, which showed a mastery learnt in a hard school. The hand he had placed on the window frame clenched and whitened. But he did not change his position and his voice did not alter.

"I merely asked out of interest," Hunziger said.

"Well, since you are interested I could remind you that garages have a habit of remembering hammering jobs and paint jobs, especially when they are done in a hurry and paid at double rates. And also that the police administration of my state, fortunately, is not in the hands of your State Commissioner, whether he is in his office or catching fish.

"Also that the F.B.I. are always interested in—what shall we call them, Captain—miscarriages of justice? Perhaps you would not like the alternative descriptions. Good afternoon, Captain Hunziger."

He had not reached the door when the Captain spoke, still without altering his fixed regard out of the window.

"That is a nice boy you have there, Mr. Hart—"

An icy hand seemed to grip Robert's heart. In three strides he stood at the window, beside the Captain, looking down into the forecourt. Ed lolled in the front seat, his feet up, an ice-cream cone in his hand.

"How old would he be, now—fourteen?"

Robert forced himself to answer in spite of the constriction in his throat.

"Fifteen."

"I thought so. A good age. Old enough to understand."

For a long and dreadful moment they stood there by the window while the silence seemed to thicken and sag, heavy with tension, oppressive with fear and racked with the pain of all the words he dared not speak.

There was so much he wanted to say. There was so much he felt he ought to do. He could defy him and threaten him and intimidate him, and even use violence on him—but what would be the use? This one was a pawn—a small wheel that turned in its well-greased and appointed place. If one wheel dropped out, the machine would still function.

Robert knew that he might as well keep quiet. Further talk would accomplish nothing.

Slowly, frustrated and bitter, he walked out of the double door and crossed the asphalt to his car.

"What happened, dad?"

"No luck, Ed. The owner of the Caddy is a big wheel here."

He laughed bitterly. "So big that when he says he hasn't been out this afternoon, the whole Police Department believe him."

"But—"

"But nothing. That's the deal, son. You can either sit in or you needn't play. It's as direct and simple as that."

For a while they drove in silence, each one busy with his own thoughts. Robert took the same road out of the city. He felt that he owed it to the driver of the pick-up to tell him what had happened. And he also had the gun to return.

They were climbing the foothills of the residential section when Ed spoke again.

"I don't get it, dad. Did you tell these cops we actually saw it?"

"A police force is only as good as its top man, Ed," Robert explained slowly and heavily. "I had to talk to the Chief. It was not something I could report to the Sergeant. And the top man would not play. It's as simple as that."

Ed leaned over the back of his seat and looked behind. When he spoke his voice was different.

"Dad, that blue Caddy's coming along behind. The same one."

Robert nodded even as he stepped on the gas pedal and the car roared away in a surge of speed. He was not greatly surprised. The pattern had been there before, plain and clear to see, in-

side the building of the Police Headquarters.

All his emotion had been experienced then, in those terrible seconds when his mind had run on and on, estimating, appraising, conjecturing . . . Now it seemed that he could not feel any more. Now he was a husk, drained of thought and empty of feeling. Now he was an automaton, driving a car.

"Can you see how many there are inside?"

"No, too far away."

"All right. Hold tight. Let's see how Wyeth tuned her."

They roared up the last incline, drifted round the curve without diminishing speed and swept down the other side to the dusty plain on the far edge of which towered the blue line of the Sierra Madriga, the farthest peaks faintly obscured by haze.

Robert drove like a man inspired, his elbows tucked in, his hands wide and steady on the wheel, his shoulders well back against the leather seat, his foot hard down on the floor. There were no hedges, only scattered clumps of mesquite. He could see the road for miles ahead.

Half-way across he called out to Ed. "Where are they now, son?"

"Still holding us—about the same distance behind."

He nodded. "Only to be expected. It's a much faster car."

"I bet he can't drive it as well as you, dad," said Ed loyally.

Robert laughed and then made up his mind. He would try to gain a little more on the long climb up and then he would stop at the gully and fight it out. After all, he had a gun. And the other man might help. God knew he had enough cause.

In any case, he could not go on running like this all his life—not with that unspoken threat hanging over him. They had his name and address. He was too vulnerable. There were hours in the day when he was occupied with his classes and could not be expected to keep an eye on Ed. That was when they would strike, when he was not there. Far better to get this thing over and done with, whatever the outcome, whatever the cost.

NOW THAT HE had made his decision, he felt a great sense of peace. This was the way the cards had been dealt. This was how he would play them.

Thereafter he concentrated on his driving. With all his skill and all his energy he fought to gain a little more time, a few more of those precious seconds which would mean so much when they reached the gully, and with that in mind he sent the car roaring and swaying and skidding up the narrow mountain road in a series of hair-raising swerves and turns that

made even Ed reach out and clutch the door with desperate urgency.

At length—it seemed hours later—they reached the bluff. Robert cut off the gas before he swung the car around the bend, eased on the brakes and headed for the gully.

The car came to a halt with the radiator tilting to the sky, its soft springs still rocking gently on the steep slope.

"Get out. *Quick.*"

Robert had already seen as they rounded the bend. The parking-place was deserted. The pick-up had gone. The broken barrels had been rolled to one side, clear of the road. The great pool of oil still glittered, black and tragic on the white flints.

For a moment he hesitated. There was so much he wanted to say and so little time in which to say it.

"You climb right up there and disappear, son. Listen—this is important. Get yourself hidden, *and don't come out.* Don't let them find you."

Ed looked at him. "What's going to happen?"

"A fight. Gun-play."

"I'll stay. I can help."

Robert's heart warmed to him. He reached out his arms impulsively and then checked himself. There was no call, no place for sentiment with a fifteen-year-old. He would not care to remember his old man slobbering.

He contented himself with touching the boy's head gently with one hand—remembering vividly and poignantly how tightly and closely the curls clustered around the warm soft skin.

"That's good of you, son. I appreciate your offer. But never get in a gunfight unless you have a gun. You can't be of any use. We've only got one between us. Let me use it. Now off you go—and don't forget what I told you. 'Bye—see you later."

Now he lay behind the boot of his car, stretched out at full length with his shoulder behind the rear wheel, with the gun in his hand, covering the road.

The sun lay behind the gully and the whole scene was darker than he had remembered it earlier. And yet the air still seemed to hold some quality of that translucent and burnished daylight, so that the grey was only a shadow, only an opalescent veil which detracted nothing from the clarity and the vividness of each startling detail.

The air was still warm, still laden with the heat of a forgotten sun, and yet suddenly, fiercely, he shivered as if with cold. Now he heard the roar of the Cadillac's engine. This was no way to end a life. This was no way to terminate a career which if only moderately distinguished, had yet in its own quiet way not been entirely without merit.

This was no ending for a Professor of Philosophy and for a soldier who had fought in Normandy and the Ardennes. This was no way to go out—like a guttering flame in the darkness, killed in an obscure brawl on a deserted mountain top, the victim of a chain of circumstance whose odds were a million to one against him.

Six bullets in a gun against—how many? There might be the same four men in the car. At least two—possibly all four—would be armed.

Once before—when Marcia had been killed—he had thought his life had come to an end. For a time he had not dared to contemplate living without her. And then he had realized that Ed needed him. Whether he lived for himself or for her did not matter. He knew that he had to live for Ed. So he had gone on.

And now perhaps the time had come when he had to die for Ed. There was nothing strange, nothing frightening in the thought. It was only the same decision he had made before, taken a little further.

In that thought there was a strange comfort, a strange peace. He squared his shoulders and his fingers gripped the gun with a tense eagerness. No one had a hand in the dealing of the cards. It was up to a man to play them as they fell.

And then the roar—which all this time had been resounding in his head in an ever-increasing crescendo of sound—suddenly burst into shattering volume as the Cadillac hurtled around the corner.

The driver caught sight of Robert's car and simultaneously jammed on his brakes.

And the four tires locked and slid on the oil from the shattered barrels—the oil which still lay in a dark and tragic pool on the road—slid and slithered with all the momentum of their tremendous speed and the traction of two tons dead weight above them.

Frantically the driver fought with the wheel, but he never had a chance. The huge car lurched and swayed outwards in one great and uncontrollable surge. The iron handrail snapped like firewood and the car seemed to hang for a second, poisoned sickeningly in mid-air, before it plunged over the cliff.

Robert climbed slowly to his feet. He felt sick and shaken, and curiously confused. Wyeth would have said it was all simple—a clear case of a skid on a pool of oil—of cause and effect.

But Robert knew that somehow there was more—far more to it than that.

(Continued from other side)

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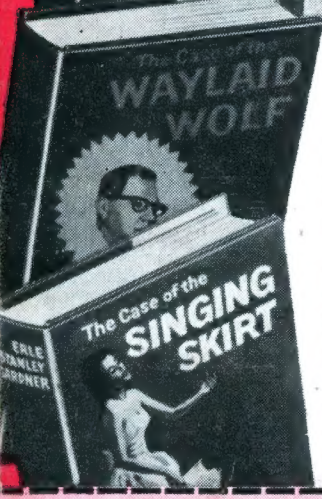

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